Javier Fresneda **Urbs and the Skeuomorph: on Modern Catacomb Architecture**

**Introduction:**

Considered as the museum that renders the history of Paris, the Carnavalet is created during the French Second Empire in an attempt to institutionalize the memory of the city. Its consolidation as municipal museum occurs simultaneously with Haussmann’s renovation of Paris; here the materialization of the history of Paris goes in hand with its material destruction.

This relationship between the fragmentation of architecture and the construction of its history becomes explicit in the Carnavalet - for instance, its Library incorporates fragments of buildings separated in time by centuries. More notorious are the Crypt and the Catacombs which currently are considered part of the Museum.

Being the former a material archive of Paris’ urban periodization - Gallo Roman, Medieval or Modern fragments are overlapped and dovetailed within seemingly homogeneous strata, the Catacombs reuse former quarries repurposed as a consecrated ossuary. In this latter case, the patterning of human remnants along its corridors takes over the quarry’s given layout. What configures the crypt’s material semblance is, at the same time, its function.

In our examination of the Carnavalet’s materiality and its ramifications, two main concepts emerge. First, the agglomeration of the anonymous and the private - domestic and human remains - configures the prehistory of urbanism. In the Roman city, the apparition of *urbs* - or agglomeration of houses - subsumed the question of the public within the generic repetition of the private. Distinctions between public and private, political and economic become merged and incorporated into the urban space, where the notion of governance gives way to the administration of the city.

Seen in this perspective, the emergence of the modern city follows the material logic of the *urbs*, where space is created by prolapsing the domestic, private space within the city. What we have currently known as ‘infrastructure’ is also the result of such endeavor. If Haussmann’s cutting-ax principle in Paris is massive, his renovation of the sewer system acquires epic proportions at either environmental, administrative and domestic scales. This protrusion of the private onto the city creates a fundamental shift;

from the sense of cohabitation within the city toward its ‘maintenance.’ In the same way as a monument, the city is in the need of conservation.

Moreover, the urban logic of repetition has aesthetic and cognitive implications; it denotes the leap undertook by technical arrangements into artistic ornaments. The term ‘skeuomorph’ coined by archaeologist Colley March in Evolution and Psychology in Art (1896) does precisely so: the material imprint that once was the outcome of an instrumental need becomes repurposed simultaneously as its symbolic correlate and its functional absence. For the apparition of a skeuomorph its expectancy is as much important as its repetition. The former fulfills the absence left behind by a former technical need that, crucially, is inherited. Repetition of motifs reassures the management of meaning, while its ‘expectancy’ merely reaffirms repetition as such. The locus where expectancy and repetition dwells is the scale of the urban; the city as a process.

Inspecting notions of urbanism and skeuomorphism at the subterranean level allows an understanding not only of their narrative interstices - the verge between urban and not urban, ‘use’ and ‘access’ - but also their modes of museographic and touristic consumption. Since the conservation and appreciation of material history are inevitably iconoclastic, to recognize urbanistic expectations allows exploring the city understood as the surficial expression of its infrastructure.

**Description:** *Urbs and the Skeuomorph* will be a three-sessions workshop conducted by Javier Fresneda whose main objective is to explore the role of material heritage within the discourse of architectural value.

**Structure:** the workshop follows a sequence that begins with the delineation of a robust theoretical field and follows with a practical session devoted to the art of pulverizing samples taken from diverse patrimonial architectures.

**Syllabus:** participants will receive a Syllabus and related bibliography before starting the workshop. Fresneda will provide also the essential objects required for the practical session.