gone-built: exposing an interior phenomenon of ephemerality through the exhibitions designs of the aalto atelier

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abstract

Built interiors do not last indefinitely, or indeed stay untouched, but interiors cannot be categorised so clearly as built and unbuilt, existing and not existing. There is another state to recognise in relation to them, and that is what this essay explores and refers to as the *gone-built* interior. These are interiors that were designed for a specific function for a defined period of time. During their existence they remained untouched, and while no longer physically around, they have left behind traces in archives. The remaining artefacts and ephemera of their existence allow us to investigate this phenomenon of temporariness in more detail, and consider elements of their definition that have relevance to our wider interiors discourse. They allow us to consider our processes as designers in ways that other categories of the unbuilt do not and invite experimentation and boldness of design in a way that more permanent interiors cannot. This essay uses the Finnish architectural practice the Aalto Atelier as a study, due to the form and number of exhibitions they undertook, and the long time period over which this engagement happened. It unpacks three key themes around the gone-built, in relation to their exhibition designs: elemental spolia, indicative representation, and propaganda. Finally, it demonstrates how the gone-built is an important state to understand as interior designers, and how we can use it to support our interior design ideas and practices by engaging with the opportunity for experimentation in design, sustainable practice, and dissemination of ideas it provides.

keywords

exhibition design; interiors; photography; ephemeral; Aalto Atelier

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introduction

In considering the difference in human engagement between built and unbuilt interiors we tend to focus on the fact that the built is a tangible space that creates narratives, images, and experiences that continue to be disseminated, and the unbuilt remains in our imagination. This arises because of the social interactions that occur in built space. As the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre explains, 'nothing disappears completely, nor can what subsists be defined solely in terms of traces, memories or relics.'[1] Lefebvre's comments relate to ideas explored by the architectural historian and theorist Sophia Psarra, who has investigated how our relationship with physical spaces is due to how the space was initially conceived by the designers, how we perceive it as we experience it, and the cultural context that occurs due to the interaction of these two states.[2]

An unbuilt project, while following the same initial design stages as a built one, has had its potential and experience curtailed by its failure to be physically realised. We can only imagine what it might have been like, and the narratives we create are purely speculative and usually focused on the positive. However, in the world of interiors there are very important projects that sit between built and unbuilt that we all too often overlook. These are what this essay refers to as the gone-built—projects that were built, but no longer exist. More specifically, as defined by Lefebvre, they are spaces that can no longer be occupied, in the sense that by occupation of a space we understand it more completely both physically and experientially.[3] As the Finnish architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa explains, we experience these physical spaces 'through our embodied existence and capacity of projection and identification.'[4] Within this less examined category there are two very clear distinctions to make—projects that did exist and are now no longer (for example, interiors within buildings that have now been demolished or redesigned completely), and those that were built purely to be ephemeral and stayed unchanged during their relatively short lifespan (for example retail pop-ups, stage sets, and exhibitions). It is this last category and group, namely exhibitions, this essay will examine in more detail, as they uniquely have been designed as a form of parasitical interiors, moulding to their host location, creating an interior with a clear purpose of information dissemination, which then evaporates, leaving no physical trace behind. This ethos of 'in and out', rather than the 'stay as long as you can' mantra we as designers hope our interiors will adhere to, is what makes exhibitions particularly relevant in the gone-built genre. As the historian Paul Greenhalgh notes in relation to such projects, they disappear 'into an abrupt oblivion, victims of their planned temporality.'[5]

Exhibitions do, however, leave behind some trace from which important information can be discerned, be it photographs of installation, newspaper and journal articles, or archive drawings. Very occasionally an element of the exhibition will reappear later in some other format. To understand the nature of this type of project and its importance in our interior lexicon, it is necessary to analyse this residual material. For gone-built projects archives are extremely important in gaining an understanding of them. As the political scientist and academic Lavinia Stan notes, they are invaluable for 'data gathering for case study research that is focused on the past and its impact on the present.'[6] She also reminds us to remember that 'the reality as reflected in the archived records might differ from the reality as experienced by the people who lived it.'[7] Indeed, that is a point to consider in relation to our understanding of any interior where we have not been directly involved in its creation or visited it. This essay uses the exhibitions of the Aalto Atelier to consider the gone-built under the categories of interior spolia, indicative representation, and propaganda, the meanings of which will be exposed in later sections of this essay. Their archive, now managed by the Alvar Aalto foundation, contains the material explored.

The approach undertaken by the Aalto Atelier has been chosen to explain these categories due to the practice's longevity and position in architecture and interior design history. It was established in 1923 and operated in Finland until it closed in 1994. Its three principals Alvar (1898–1976) and his wives Aino (1894–1949) and Elissa (1922–94), ran one of the most significant architecture and design practices of the modern movement, and the most iconic practice to emerge from Finland. Their work in various fields including housing, public buildings, and churches is well documented in numerous books. Alongside the practice, Aino and Alvar, in collaboration with fellow Finns the art collector and patron Maire Gullischen and art historian and writer Nils Gustav Hahl, also established the interior company Artek in 1935. An acronym for art and technology, the aim of the company was to 'engage in furniture trade and promote, through exhibitions and other means, modern housing culture.'[8] Aino held the role of managing director until her death, and the company is still operating to this day.

It is this timespan, and the fact that exhibitions were not their main project field, that allows us to investigate how they evolved this type of project throughout the practice's existence. While their projects such as Paimio Sanitorium (1929–33), the Church of the Three Crosses (1956–58), and Finlandia Hall (1971) are internationally recognised, their exhibition projects are not explored in any detail. The Aaltos engaged with exhibition design in various ways. Initially, the focus was on elements of National Fairs in Finland. This then developed to pavilions representing Finland at the World's Fairs in Paris (1937) and New York (1939), along with the Venice Biennale (1956). The practice also undertook several retrospectives of their and Artek's work in various countries, along with exhibitions focusing on the themes of standardisation and housing. Their projects also formed elements within travelling exhibitions of Finnish architecture, run by the Museum of Finnish Architecture (MFA) and other organisations.

The question of why this aspect of their work is less explored is simple to respond to. Social media, the internet, and various forms of printed publication allow the dissemination of imagery and information of interiors to be easily accessible. However, if there is not a physical space to visit and engage with, or we cannot even read about someone else's recent experience in that space, then these projects become less accessible, or of less interest. By understanding the following elements of the gone-built in this context, we can consider how as designers we can learn about elemental reuse, design experimentation, and ways to expose our ideas through the media from these types of projects.

interior spolia

The architectural term spolia relates to the reuse of stone from one building to another, often as the result of pillage and plunder, reducing what was once a building to building materials to be used to construct something new.[9] However, we rarely apply this term in relation to interiors, when in fact we are reusing and adapting existing elements in an interior context much more often than we might in the shell of a building. As British interior educators Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone note, 'spolia is an overlooked and meaningful tactic for reuse and is a method of designing that is particular and unique to the creation of interior space.'[10] Therefore, within interiors the concept of spolia is a less violent phenomenon, and one that still has an important contemporary relevance.

Within exhibition design, the reuse and reinvention of display stand systems and cases is not uncommon. Public institutions, such as galleries and museums, often have an in-house kit of parts that can be adapted for temporary exhibition, as opposed to stands that are designed for permanent displays or specific objects. In these situations, these modular elements play a secondary role to the exhibition's focus and the related artefacts on show. There is also the scenario where an exhibition may travel to more than one venue, and as such display elements are installed in various

venues with different spatial layouts. The contents will also undergo some form of rearrangement within the overall exhibition design, due to variations in room formats between venues. While the contents may be the same, the presentation changes and this alters how visitors experience and respond to it. However, there is a more specific feature of interior spolia that the gone-built can contain within the exhibition context, and that is an element that reappears in other situations, and in doing so gives us a sense of its original use, but not always successfully.

This phenomenon can be explained, in relation to the Aaltos' work, through the example of a column from their Finnish pavilion at the Paris World's Fair of 1937. World's Fairs first came to international attention in 1851 with the Great Exhibition in London. This idea of taking a large area of a city and inviting different nations to build pavilions to showcase their identity through trade and national themes continues to this day with international Expos. These types of exhibitions usually have an overall theme the exhibitors respond to in their designs and content. In 1937, this theme was *Art et Techniques dans la vie moderne* (Art and technology in modern life). As well as designing the pavilion, the Aaltos were also responsible for the interior design and curation of the exhibition within it. Their brief was to present an overall cultural picture of Finland through export trade promotion.[11] The Finnish pavilion was located by the Trocadero in central Paris, on the other side of the River Seine from the Eiffel Tower. Situated on a sloping site with trees to the south of the Palais de Chaillot, the resultant two-storey building followed the contours of the ground, sitting between the trees and engaging visitors with both the interior and exterior. Built entirely of timber, it was a series of spaces connected by colonnades and mezzanines, conveying the essence of Finland not just in its form but also in its materiality.

A review of remaining photographs of the exhibition show there were several different column designs used in the pavilion. They are all made of wood, and clearly demonstrate a design evolution by Alvar and Aino of the timber column from raw trunk to modernist structural form. With these designs they have suggested their own classical order. This essay focuses on the most refined of these orders. As the drawing shows, it was formed from a central section of boxwood, with Douglas fir forming the feature fins [Fig. 01].

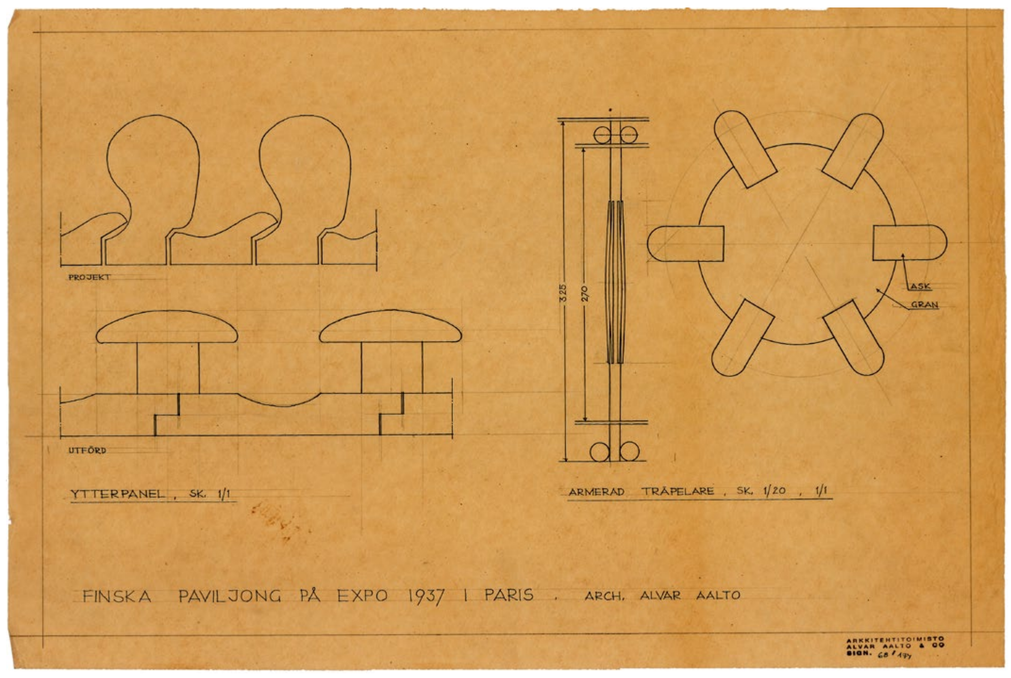

Figure 01.
Drawing of the column in elevation and plan on right-hand side of the sheet. Drawing reference 68-174. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Columns like this can clearly be seen in this photograph of the exhibition in use, as part of the internal courtyard colonnade structure [Fig. 02].

Figure 02.
Close up of columns on the colonnade canopy in Finnish Pavilion at the Paris World's Fair 1937. Photograph reference 68-06-031. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Once the exhibition closed the pavilion was dismantled, and there are no real records of what happened to it. However, one of these columns has reappeared in several exhibitions by the Aaltos since. The first was the twenty-five-year retrospective of the practice's work entitled 'Alvar and Aino', which was held in 1947 in the *Taidehalli* (Art Hall), in Helsinki. Here we see it as part of a wider display about the pavilion [Fig. 03].

It is located between two display boards, each displaying photographs of the pavilion. It has been mounted on a small, square stand so it can be exhibited vertically. Behind it is a mocked-up panel of the main pavilion cladding. In this context, the interior spolia function still has some reference to the original function; however, the format of presentation focuses more on its materiality than its function in the original pavilion. As such it feels more like a mood board than a 1:1 part of the building. When it next appeared in public it was displayed in a different scenario.

In 1965–66, a retrospective exhibition of the practice's work was held in the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence. The exhibition was designed in conjunction with the Italian architect, and previous Atelier employee in the 1950s, Leonardo Mosso.[12] We can see the column displayed in a space created within the gallery from plywood display boards for walls and timber planking for the ceiling. It is between some photographs and a plan of the atelier's Maison Carré (1956–63) and a display of light fittings designed by the Aaltos [Fig. 04].

Figure 03.
Column on display as part of the Alvar and Aino retrospective exhibition at the Taidehalli, Helsinki, 1947. Photograph reference Akn 15-8. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Figure 04.
Column exhibited as part of the Alvar Aalto exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi, Florence 1965–66. Photograph reference 105715. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

In this setting it has more of a sense of being a structural element than it did in the 1947 exhibition. However, it still feels detached from its original context, as none of the photographs around it are of the 1937 Paris exhibition. Its role therefore, while appearing structural, is more related to the interior space Mossi has created than as a representation of its original use. The height and form of the ceiling in this part of the exhibition is like that in the original pavilion. As such, while reappearing in a totally different context, it still has a functionality in the overall essence of the exhibition. This is a much more comprehensive example of interior spolia, where the original is creating a new interior through its format or reappropriation and representation.

The following year, Alvar and Elissa presented a further exposition of their work at the Ateneum in Helsinki, this time designed in conjunction with the architect Kristian Gullischen, a previous employee

and the son of Maire Gullischen. The column then appears in this exhibition placed next to an iconic photograph of the clustered wooden columns in the pavilion [Fig. 05]. However, in this presentation of the column it appears as an afterthought, rather than a considered part of the display design. To present it out of functional context, that is, showing it more as a sculptural element than a structural one, weakens its relationship to the pavilion and in turn the design ethos of that building.

While a physical link to the original exhibition existed through this one element, when exhibited in isolation in later exhibitions it lost its original impact. It is therefore clear that gone-built projects physically change once the project is dismantled and removed. Within gone-built then true elements of the exhibition's essence, however small and secondary they may seem, are redolent of the original exhibitions. However, the column becomes a rather awkward object in its later uses, due to a lack of consideration in some scenarios for how this reuse happens. It is useful in understanding the scale of the original building, but even that is somewhat lost when there are no other physical expressions of the pavilion adjacent to the column in the exhibition. Within the context of interior spolia, the reuse of an element, regardless of the context, is only successful if its role within the new interior is well considered and resolved. In architectural spolia a piece of stone that is reused becomes part of a much stronger whole. With gone-built the element of spolia can diminish in impact, as can be seen in this example. Due to the nature of exhibitions, this elemental reuse is possible; you would not, for example, be able to remove elements from more permanent interiors in such a way, and if you were to do so then their reinstallation would likely be much more permanent and functional, such as a historic door being installed in a new space.

In gone-built projects elements of interior spolia are not subsumed into the interior in the same way that architectural spolia is. As designers therefore we need to be mindful of how we reuse these elements.

Figure 05.
Column on display in the Alvar Aalto exhibition at the Ateneum, Helsinki 1967. Photograph reference 107396-62. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Engaging with sustainable, reusable, and circular economy-focused interiors is vital in the interiors industry if we are to support the United Nations Agenda 21 on Sustainability.[13] As the architectural educator Simone Ferracina notes, 'the functional value of an object is not necessarily determined by its intrinsic properties (rigidity, porosity, weight, texture, etc.), but by the object's equipmental fitness – by how well it adheres to and augments an ecology of interconnected tools.'[14] The opportunity and success of interior spolia's ability to be reused is key to this, as the Aaltos' exhibitions have shown. Its relevance is more easily perceived by the viewer where it reinvents and reappropriates, within a comparable context. By considering this on the scale of interior spolia, then we can start to improve the balance between ephemeral materials and the environmental impact of exhibitions.

indicative representation

The second element to consider is indicative representation. This is the process by which aspects of the interior are manifested slightly differently to how we would normally expect them to be, but not so differently that we experience them disparately. Within exhibitions this is elements of display that have a specific purpose but are presented slightly differently from how we might experience them

usually, often in a way that hints at a reality, rather than presenting something exactly as is. This is where the timescale of the gone-built is important, both in duration of exhibition and the visitor experience. For exhibitions that are designed for a high footfall, or limited time for visitor engagement, how the key message is communicated is vital. To explain this scenario, the 1930 *Pienasuntonäyttely* (Minimum Apartment Exhibition) in Helsinki's *Taidehalli,* arranged by the Aaltos, will be used.

The themes of housing and standardisation were dominant in this period in European architecture, due to the need to provide better housing in the aftermath of World War I. Discussions around minimum dwellings were key to the agenda of modernists. In 1928 the *Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) was established, with the aim to promote the Modern Movement in architecture. Its 1929 Frankfurt meeting, to which Alvar was invited for the first time as the Finnish representative of the organisation, focused on the topic of defining the minimum habitable dwelling.[15] Then in 1930, the *Stockholmsutställningen* (Stockholm Exhibition) opened. Focusing on Swedish arts and crafts and home industries, it is recognised as the first European exhibition where the exhibition halls and pavilions were designed in the functionalist style of architecture. It was based around the three key themes of architecture, street, and home, with particular focus on new ideas around housing.[16] The exhibition itself was designed by the Swedish Architect Gunnar Asplund, a friend of the Aaltos. They followed the exhibition closely, and it influenced their own exhibition work, particularly the design of the 1929 Turku Fair, which they designed in conjunction with the Finnish Architect Erik Bryggman.[17]

Alvar, while very positive in general about the Stockholm Exhibition, was not so content with the interiors of the model dwellings on show. He felt the standard was good but that 'the furniture, its grouping, the lighting etc, has often not risen above clichéd standards of comfort.'[18] He wanted to present ideas around new ways of living to the Finnish people, in relation to layout and interior content. This was significant in Finland, as at that time it was undergoing a period of reconstruction following its independence from Russia in 1917. The subsequent civil war of 1918 had increased migration to the cities, resulting in housing becoming an urgent topic for architects to address.

In the Minimum Apartment Exhibition, Alvar and Aino were responsible for the design and furnishing of a kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms. The concept of indicative representation is evident in the way they designed these spaces. They created a display that allowed direct engagement with the ideas, but not exactly as you would experience them in a real home. Although the rooms were at 1:1 scale, the walls you would usually find in a house were not all there. If they had been, it would not have been possible to see the rooms connected. The overall flat layout was also slightly altered to create a much wider corridor between kitchen and living areas and the bedroom. This was to facilitate the movement of visitors through the space [Fig. 06]. While the experience was like entering a real flat, abstracting the visual experience in relation to the angle and depth of view across the apartment allowed the visitor to see all the elements together, thereby more easily connecting the experience

Figure 06.
View of Minimum Apartment showing the end of the kitchen area noted as keittio (kitchen) on the cupboard visible bottom left, with living areas beyond and the two bedrooms to the right. Photograph reference 103216. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

in their memory. That it was not a real apartment meant visitors connected with the familiar and subconsciously filled in the gaps of the unfamiliar. In the bedroom areas, for example, full-size windows were installed in walls that were built to waist height [Fig. 07]. This allowed multiple visitors to view the proposals without going into the spaces, and also flow smoothly around them. This installation is manipulative in that it makes the reality of a 50–60 sqm apartment seem much more open as the walls are not presented as the barriers they would be.[19]

What the Aaltos have also done with this form of indicative representation, with the dominance of the window in the space, is to engage us with the idea of light in the room. They have managed in this one simple move to restore significance to the window, altering it from being an absence in a wall, as described by Pallasmaa, to a key element of focus of light and transparency.[20]

With the Aaltos, though, this style of presentation is not a one-off occurrence. What we are seeing experimented with here in the Minimum Apartment Exhibition is this idea that visitors' engagement from above connects them directly with the exhibit and in doing so creates an instant memory of the space. You are immediately invited to engage, even before you are physically in front of that element of the exhibition. They were to use this idea in later exhibitions such as the Paris World's Fair in 1937 [Fig. 08] and the Artek Pavilion at the City of Hedemora, in Sweden's 500th Anniversary Fair in 1946 [Fig. 09].

Using voids in interiors to provide views to other areas of the exhibition can also be seen in permanent gallery spaces, such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. As Psarra notes, the use of atriums, walkways, and cut outs in floors reveals to the visitor to the space like a 'three-dimensional map.'[21] In the Minimum Apartment Exhibition, the Aaltos are doing this not to the building, or indeed the interior, but the exhibit itself. Just as the phenomena of interior spolia explored

Figure 07.
View into the bedroom areas of apartment at the Minimum Housing Exhibition, Helsinki 1930, showing possible furniture layouts. Photograph reference 103215. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Figure 08.
View from upper level of the Finnish pavilion at the Paris World's Fair 1937, looking down into room layouts below. Photograph reference 68-006-037. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

the removal of an element and its relocation impacting memory and connections, in this element of indicative representation, it is the manipulation of aspects of the element in its original form that creates a memory for the visitor. For exhibitions like this that focused on the domestic interior, it was a very important social message the Aaltos were getting across. Its aim was to encourage people to live in a new way, one that would benefit not just them but also the Finnish nation in its reconstruction. It also creates a format that can be evolved within later exhibitions to continue this

response from visitors. This creation of reality from the unreal is not something that can happen in more permanent built interiors.

propaganda

The final element considered in this essay is propaganda. While the term itself, in the early part of the twentieth century, was commonly associated with specific organisational doctrines and the deliberate spreading of harmful information, Aino and Alvar were not considering it in those ways, nor were they part of those ideologies. For the Aaltos, the term propaganda, in this context, refers to their way of promoting and disseminating their design ideas, and their own image through publicity. That these were often tied to issues relating to the political situation in Finland and further afield was not something they necessarily shied away from. When they co-founded Artek, they were heavily involved in the creation of its manifesto, of which one of the three key elements was propaganda—the other two being industry and interiors, and modern art.[22] Throughout their time in practice, they disseminated their ideas through the use of imagery, both of their projects in publications and in the case of exhibitions, within them. Alvar had close connections with architectural journalists and wrote for various architectural periodicals during his life. In this way he was aware of the power of the press and the opportunities it offered for the promotion of their work. He was very involved in deciding not only which photographs were taken of their completed works, but also which ones were used and where.

Photographs, on the surface, appear to provide us with an image of the exhibition; however, there is more to consider within that image. As the French philosopher and theorist Roland Barthes explains, the photograph is the result of three practices: to go, to undergo, and to look. For the image to exist it requires someone to take it (the photographer), something to be in it (the person or object being photographed), and someone to look at it (the spectator).[23] The Aaltos, especially Aino, were very engaged with photography from their student

Figure 09.
View from upper level to lower level within the Aalto-designed Artek pavilion at the Swedish city of Hedemora's 500th anniversary Exhibition 1946. Upper level exhibition of housing by Ernst Sundh, who also built the pavilion, with room layouts by Artek visible on the lower level. Photograph reference 101256. With permission from the Alvar Aalto Foundation.

days. The practice was known to manipulate photographs of their completed project, to show them in the best way. They became close friends with the Hungarian artist and photographer László Moholy-Nagy, with whom Aino shared an abstract style of photographing buildings.[24] When taking photographs of their Viipuri Library (1935) on completion, for example, it is documented that to give the right setting for the entrance, one of their assistants, Aarne Ervi, had to stand on a ladder holding a branch to frame the shot.[25] Here we clearly see them controlling the image of this building that was promoted to the public, who were not able to visit it. However, it is the view of photographs, relevant in the time of the Aaltos and today, that also needs to be considered. The American writer and critic Susan Sontag explains that historically images have always been ways for us to interpret reality, and as our connections to religious iconography lessened what then strengthened was our connection to other types of images, especially photographs in modern society.[26] In response to her thoughts on photography, the art critic John Berger elaborates by saying that although photographs preserve an appearance or a moment in time, what they fail to do is preserve meaning, as they do not narrate.[27]

Within the Aaltos' exhibitions photography occurs in two main formats: photographs within the exhibitions themselves and photographs of the exhibitions. These have relevance both at the time of the exhibition's existence and subsequently. They could be considered to have an overlap with concepts of interior spolia; however, their function, or indeed form, does not change. Once a preferred photograph of a project has been taken, it tends to get used every time that project forms part of an exhibition. In the second format, then, photographs taken to record an installation of an exhibition, once open, are really the only visual connection we have to these gone-built projects. It is important to recognise that photographs themselves, whether they be in historic analogue or modern digital format, are important conveyors of propaganda. As the architect and theorist Petra Ceferin notes, we receive photographic images without noticing, and they influence our thoughts and actions without leaving us much choice.[28] Propaganda is the last strand of gone-built to connect us to these projects from the past. By its nature it is also the most endemic and powerful, yet the one we tend to question the least.

Propaganda in the gone-built can be explained through Alvar's 1945 exhibition *Amerikka Rakentaa* (America Builds), which was held in the Ateneum in Helsinki. Here we see ideas around propaganda directly linked to actual narrative, as opposed to physical narrative, which interior spolia and indicative replication embody. This exhibition was influenced by the Aaltos' connections in America and the political situation in both that country and Finland in relation to the impact of World War II. For the Aaltos, this exhibition was both strategic and design focused. The exhibition itself evolved from the 1942 'Built in the USA: 1932–1944' exhibition organised by MoMA. Its purpose, as noted in the accompanying catalogue by the architect and MoMA board of Trustees member Philip L. Goodwin, was to show the excellence of modern buildings in the USA in that twelve-year period.[29] It was then restaged in a slightly different format in Stockholm in 1944 as *Amerikka Bygger* (America Builds). Overseen by the *Sverige-Amerika Stiftelsen* (Sweden-America Foundation), the aim was to develop ties between Sweden and America. The exhibition was split into five sections of display along with a reading room for the visitor.[30]

Alvar was instrumental in bringing *Amerikka Rakentaa* to Finland due to his connections in America and Sweden. The exhibition was supported jointly by the Finnish Architects Association *Suomen Arkkitehtiliitto Finlands Arkitektförbund* (SAFA), of which Alvar would become Chairman from 1943 to 1958, and the Finnish American Association. He had worked closely with America during the war in his role as Chief of Reconstruction Propaganda in the State Department of Information.[31] MoMA had also afforded Alvar and Aino their first solo practice show in 1938 with the 'Alvar Aalto: Architecture and Furniture' exhibition. The aim of America Builds was to expose America to Finland, but for the Aaltos this was a key form of propaganda. It exposed them further in their home country, where their reputation was already established, and in America where they wanted to develop their reputation further. Alvar wrote an article about this in the Finnish architectural magazine *Arkkitehti* (*Finnish Architectural Review*), which was highly illustrated and descriptive. Although the images were in black and white, descriptions of colours are noted under some of them, which is unusual in articles of this nature at that time. This supports an even greater understanding of what the exhibition was like, with the photographs on their own depicting an exhibition design composed of form, texture, and areas of intrigue. However, for the professional readers of *Arkkitehti*, this way of presenting the exhibition both in the flesh and in print was an important reminder of the impact of the show. As noted in the inner page of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, its printing was made possible by sponsorship from key American companies at that time: Ford, Nobel Standard, Vacuum Oil Company, and Metro

Goldwyn Mayer Films.[32] This funding allowed for a much more opulent and visually engaging style of exhibition than had occurred in its earlier versions in America and Sweden.

We can see also the use of photography as propaganda within the exhibition itself in its design, and in the location and types of photographic images that formed the display. There is also a strong Finnish context explored in the design of this exhibition. The use of timber and reference to nature is evident in the wooden screens and planting used throughout [Fig. 10]. With this exhibition Alvar was not just promoting America in Finland, but Finland to America.

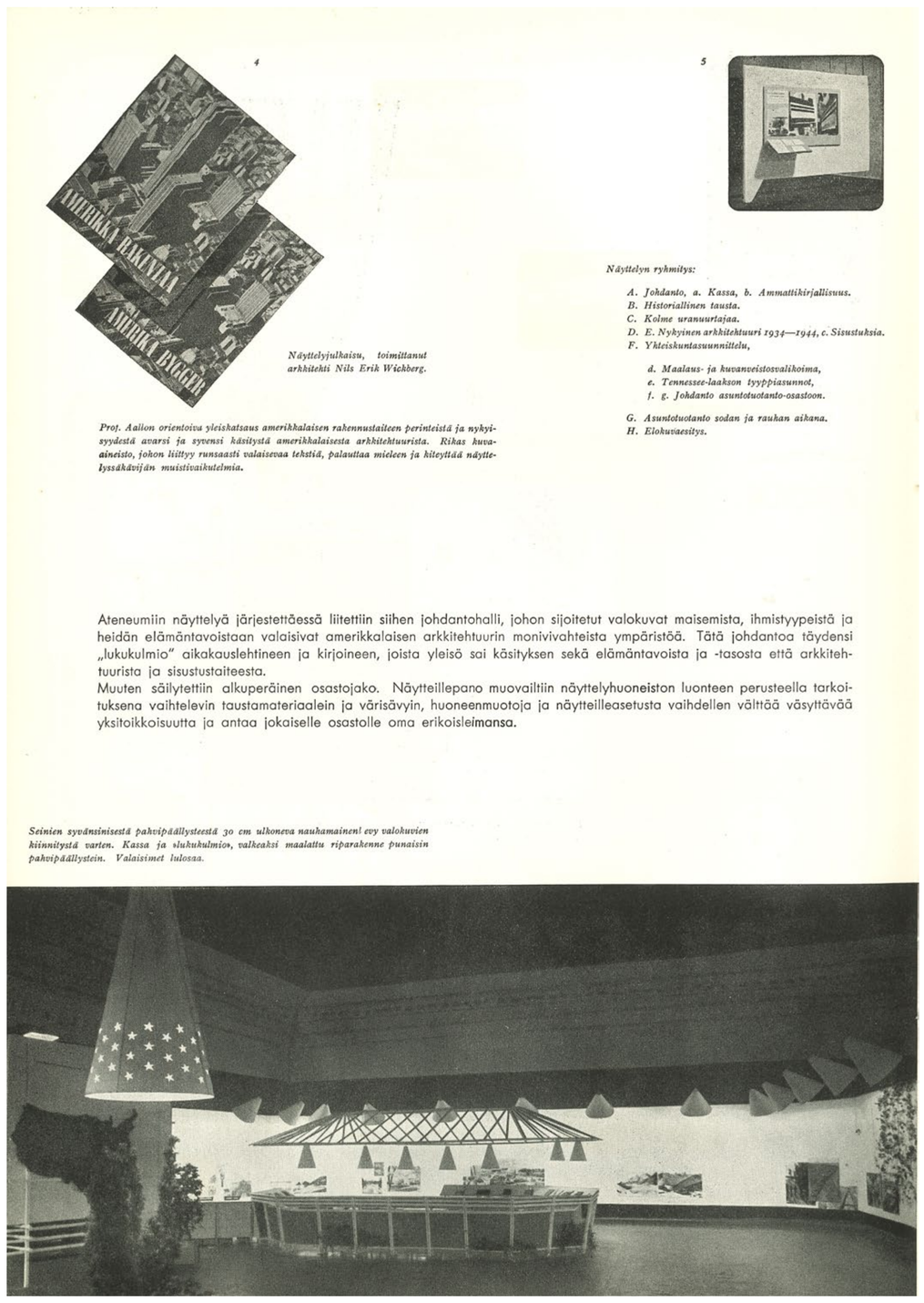

Figure 10.
Page 4 from article on *Amerikka Rakentaa* (America Builds) 1945 exhibition, from page 4 of *Arkkitehti* (*Finnish Architectural Review*) Issue 1–2, 1945. The bottom image notes, 'The deep strip around the top is blue, the central structure is painted white, with red infill panels. There is also a 30cm band within this for attaching photographs to. The light fittings are available to buy.' With permission from *Arkkitehti* magazine.

It is this calculated use of photography as propaganda that delivers the final element of gone-built and with it the ability to engage with a wider audience beyond the physical visitors at the time. Of course, this could be said about all projects in some way, but with gone-built exhibitions it is about creating an interior that provides impact, and exposing that impact directly through other media sources. It is an interior cluster bomb of information and narrative, and through the process of contemporary reflection, we can also engage with it as an interior with more to teach us about promotion and dissemination of ideas beyond its initial function as an exhibition.

The engagement of the Aaltos with publicity and image was evident in both the throwaway and takeaway elements of exhibition propaganda. When an exhibition has a catalogue, that is a takeaway element, bought by those wanting to remember or refer to the exhibition later. Even though these usually include high-quality photographs and text to explain and discuss the exhibitions' themes and content, rarely do they contain images of the actual exhibition. This is due to print lead-in times for publication, meaning the catalogue is completed well in advance of the exhibition being installed. The throwaway element is the publicity in periodicals and newspapers. This can have a more intense engagement, but for a much shorter time. It is also likely to be the format in which photographs of the actual exhibition appear to the public. For that reason, the design elements, along with their descriptions, are key to the propaganda associated with the America Builds exhibition. As with any travelling exhibition, visitors only concentrate really on the show they are seeing, not its previous or future incarnations. Most visitors would not have been aware of, or been interested in, what it looked like in New York or Stockholm, and this allowed Alvar to make the changes he did and to expose it in the way he did in the media. With America Builds, the timescales to promote the political message that Finland was now more aligned with America than Germany was key, not just to the Aaltos as architects, but to Finland as a country.

conclusion

In thoughts and discussions around aspects of interiors, there is very rarely a clean-cut way of categorising something or explaining its importance. We pigeonhole interiors in many ways and on many different levels. This is true of the work of the Aalto Atelier, where publication and analysis has focused on their completed buildings, especially those that are still in existence today. What this essay shows is that within the accepted—built and unbuilt, existing and lost, successful and forgotten—diaspora of interior categorisation there is space for gone-built projects. These are not once-built, and therefore have their own important place in the interior lexicon. It is their ephemerality and process of design we need to consider. They are projects that provide us with criteria and guidelines within which to develop our wider interior discourse around sustainability, materiality, and form. They afford us opportunities that other types of projects often overlook in relation to design experimentation within built projects and the changing impact of the dissemination of our work over time.

By comprehending the challenges of interior reuse in relation to spolia we can understand that, unlike in architecture when an element becomes subsumed by the whole it becomes part of, then with interiors' reuse or repositioning greater consideration is required to ensure successful integration. With gone-built exhibitions, the element of interior spolia, due to the temporal nature of the exhibition, needs to be reused in a well-considered way. If this does not happen, then our comprehension of it is affected. Interior spolia within this context can easily fall short of its potential impact. This has parallels to Austrian-American designer Victor Papenek's ideas around the importance of synthesis in design to ensure a sustainable future.[33] Within interiors we need to consider this as the relationship of synthesis of interior elements.

In relation to timescales, it is the gone-built exhibition's predetermined lifespan that impacts design decisions. To engage large numbers of visitors and ensure they leave with a lasting memory of the exposition, then, as the Aaltos have shown, sometimes reality must be reinterpreted. In relation to interiors, they enhanced the focus on the interior by partially removing the perceived exterior element of the display, to allow the interiors to be easily viewed. In doing so, they exposed the importance of this form of manipulation, of space and visitor, within their exhibition designs.

Finally, the gone-built exhibition's relationship with propaganda has been explored through the importance of photography and the way in which images are used. Photographs taken of the exhibition interior are key to promoting it once it is open. The way in which Alvar undertook this, including a more interior focused description, means that even today we can understand what these interiors were like more clearly. This is of relevance when the exhibition itself has a more important message to disseminate than just design. In times of conflict, it exposed a way to signal a positive and focused message of change through the gone-built interior.

The gone-built has shown how ideas around interior spolia, indicative representation, and propaganda have assisted in expanding our understanding of this type of project. Analysing what has successfully, and in some cases unsuccessfully, come from the gone-built is a valuable lesson for designers. The temporary exhibition design projects undertaken by the Aaltos explored in this essay show us the importance of experimentation with design ideas, especially in relation to form and materials within our designs. They also demonstrate how to engage audiences with important messages through manipulation of design elements such as domestic interior spaces and new ways of living. These messages, while of their time, do have future relevance, and it is through retention of both construction information and as built information on projects that we create a wider legacy from which the history of design ideas, their context, and impacts can be disseminated.

For spatial design today there are lessons to learn from the gone-built in relation to how we engage users with spaces. They allow us to test design ideas in a way that other fields do not, and we should transpose that approach to the design process of more permanent projects. While the financial and, in some cases, reputational risks within an ephemeral project may seem less than in a more permanent one, we should not restrict ourselves as designers to experimentation in the ephemeral. Our ever-changing society will benefit from bolder moves within more permanent spaces. When this relates to reuse, then we must consider not just the reuse of existing elements in new work, but how new elements themselves can become future spolia. Considering the life-cycle costs of materials, and their ability to be reused is important. Alongside this we must also consider the usefulness of the element of the interior they are part of, so that functionally they become an integral part of the interior space in the future. Finally, our engagement with the gone-built must not end at the point of construction. We need to ensure we record all stages of the process, in particular installation and in use. It is the archives we create today that allow others to engage with our work in the future. Cataloguing our spaces, however temporal, through a variety of means, will create archive material future designers can engage with. We need to be aware of the role of propaganda in design to ensure when disseminating our work in publications, we are presenting reality and not a sanitised version.

The Aaltos have shown us how design experimentation within exhibitions that encompassed ideas around reuse and propaganda was occurring almost 100 years ago. We benefit today from learning from them, but we must also remember we have a responsibility to ensure future designers can learn from us. We must continue engaging with the gone-built, both as designers and researchers to ensure that happens.

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notes

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