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## The Ethical Dimension of Contrast: Reinterpreting Contemporary Architectural Interventions in Historic Contexts

Filiz Karakuş<sup>\*1</sup>✉, Hümeýra Nur Karaer<sup>2</sup>✉

<sup>1</sup> Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Department of Architecture, Türkiye

<sup>2</sup> Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Master student in Architecture, Graduate School of Natural and applied Sciences, Türkiye

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**Abstract:** This article explores the ethical ramifications of differences between contemporary architectural interventions in historic contexts. It references international principles, such as the Venice Charter (1964) and the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), and thoroughly examines the compatibility of modern interventions with historical structures, displaying meticulous respect for their original character. The study evaluates three exemplary projects: the Louvre Pyramid (I. M. Pei, 1989), Kolumba Museum (Peter Zumthor, 2007) and Salt Galata (Han Tümertekin, 2011), based on a rigorous qualitative multiple case study methodology. Each case presents a different kind of contrast (iconic, silent, and functional respectively) and thus gives a complete comparison of ethical design strategies in conservation. The results show that contrast can significantly improve the legibility, authenticity and cultural relevance of historic structures, if applied in the context of strict standards, such as respect for architecture, transparency and contextual awareness. The research therefore argues that ethical contrast is not inherently disruptive, but provides a useful framework for meaningful dialogue between contemporary design and heritage protection. These interventions are perfect examples of how contemporary building design can celebrate historical richness and serve today's functional needs, by marrying innovation and preservation.

**Key Words:** Historic buildings, Authenticity, Ethical intervention, Contemporary architecture, Conservation

**Özet:** Bu makale, tarihi bağlamlarda gerçekleştirilen çağdaş mimari müdahaleler arasındaki farklılıkların etik sonuçlarını incelemektedir. Çalışma; Venedik Şartı (1964) ve Nara Orijinallik Belgesi (1994) gibi uluslararası ilkelere atıfta bulunarak, modern müdahalelerin tarihi yapılarla uyumluluğunu, bu yapıların özgün karakterine titiz bir saygı göstererek derinlemesine incelemektedir. Araştırma, katı bir nitel çoklu vaka çalışması metodolojisine dayanarak üç örnek projeyi değerlendirmektedir: Louvre Piramidi (I. M. Pei, 1989), Kolumba Müzesi (Peter Zumthor, 2007) ve Salt Galata (Han Tümertekin, 2011). Her bir vaka (sırasıyla ikonik, sessiz ve işlevsel olmak üzere) farklı bir zıtlık türü sunmakta ve böylece koruma alanındaki etik tasarım stratejilerinin eksiksiz bir karşılaştırmasını yapmaya olanak tanımaktadır. Bulgular; zıtlığın mimari saygı, şeffaflık ve bağlamsal farkındalık gibi katı standartlar çerçevesinde uygulanması durumunda, tarihi yapıların okunabilirliğini, özgünlüğünü ve kültürel geçerliliğini önemli ölçüde artırabileceğini göstermektedir. Bu nedenle araştırma, etik zıtlığın doğası gereği yıkıcı olmadığını, aksine çağdaş tasarım ile kültürel mirasın korunması arasında anlamlı bir diyalog kurulması için faydalı bir çerçeve sunduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu müdahaleler, yenilik ve korumayı bir araya getirerek, çağdaş bina tasarımının bir yandan günümüzün işlevsel ihtiyaçlarına hizmet ederken diğer yandan tarihsel zenginliği nasıl yüceltebileceğine dair mükemmel birer örnek teşkil etmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Tarihi binalar, Özgünlük, Etik Müdahale, Çağdaş Mimari, Koruma

## 1. Introduction

The intersection of contemporary architecture and historic environments remains one of the most complex issues in conservation circles and is thus widely debated and contested. This is because any intervention in historic structures is never neutral or noncommittal but rather entails choices that have significant effects on cultural memory and intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage. Modern upgrades of historic structures must therefore depend entirely on an ethical foundation and expertise. A key aspect of this ethical dilemma is how such a novel design can coexist successfully within an established historic context without in any way undermining its authenticity<sup>1</sup>.

This paper will discuss the concept of contrast, which remains one of the most significant and debated tools in interventions today. “Surrenders of historical character” and the rejection of “stylistic mimicry” in the notions of theorists such as Ruskin and the more contemporary Brandi form the ethical foundation for the concept of difference. The Venice Charter of 1964<sup>2</sup> maintains that any interventions necessitated for historical reasons of chronological legibility must first and foremost promote the present. This has come to represent the beginning of a “dialectical” view of modern interventions, whereby contrast becomes an ethical tool to oppose the “museification” of heritage rather than a simple style<sup>3</sup>. Debates about supplementary interventions on historical buildings have developed through several conceptual enhancements. Where early concepts of conservation often promoted artistic cohesion for stylistic considerations of integrity, the 20th century brought scholars such as the Italian Cesare Brandi<sup>4</sup> to assert that all conservation and supplementation had to be distinguishable to avoid the concept of historical fraud. They introduced the requirement that interventions be “distinguishable”.

The research will be conducted by means of in-depth qualitative, interpretative multi-case study methodology, which examines and contextualizes the ethical use of contrast in recent interventions in historic constructions. An interpretative research approach best fits this type of research focusing on perceived authenticity, as meaning-making is prioritized over quantification.

Within the last years, modern design related to the conservation process gave greater and greater emphasis to the role of the documentation and analysis methods. As stated by Ulvi, “advanced methods for documentation allow for precise analyses to be carried out, to inform decisions.”<sup>5</sup> Although the present research does not specifically refer to the process of digital surveying, the essential role of the

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<sup>1</sup> ICOMOS, *The Nara Document on Authenticity* (Nara: ICOMOS, 1994)

<sup>2</sup> ICOMOS, *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter)* (Venice: ICOMOS, 1964)

<sup>3</sup> Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, çev. Lauren M. O’Connell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Carlota Santabarbara Morera ve Valerie Magar Meurs, “Cesare Brandi and Contemporary Art: Theory, Aesthetic and Restoration. A Tempestuous Dialectic,” *Conversaciones* 7 (2019): 249-266.

<sup>5</sup> Ali Ulvi, “Importance of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in the Documentation of Cultural Heritage,” *Turkish Journal of Engineering* 4, no. 3 (2020): 104–12.

study as a comparison lies within the methodological principles that can be considered as the backbone of research analysis.

This view aligns with the need for the present century's influence to predominate in the Venice Charter (1964)<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, the implementation of such a principle is not standardized. For example, Steven Semes<sup>7</sup> condemns the radical contrast that can deprive the building of its traditional language. In a similar manner, Françoise Choay<sup>8</sup> considers the definite separation of eras a moral imperative to guarantee the legibility of eras. Concerning such perspectives, in both cases, a separate identity must be observed to differentiate between the previous and the current one, whether in harmony or in discord<sup>9</sup>. Thus, in the worst situation, the established contrast may risk hiding, lessening, or absorbing the ancient architecture; in the best, however, the same principle of contrast can reinforce its authenticity. This study will address such viewpoints by establishing a moral use of the principle of contrast in a compromise situation between the past and its imitation through architecture. The research is anchored in the following research question:

“In what manner does the ethical application of contrast in contemporary architectural appendices promote and redefine the authenticity of historic buildings?”

To examine this question, this paper will consider three major instances of modern additions within historic environments:

- The Louvre Pyramid (I. M. Pei, 1989)<sup>10</sup>
- Kolumba Museum (Peter Zumthor, 2007)<sup>11</sup>
- Salt Galata (Han Tümertekin, 2011)<sup>12</sup>

The three case studies have been selected because they represent three distinct styles of contrast: assertive, restrained, and regulation-compliant, thereby enabling an investigation of how different design strategies interact with the authenticity of historic buildings. The research is underpinned by the principles of legibility and minimum intervention expressed in the Venice Charter (1964)<sup>13</sup> and by the Nara Document on Authenticity's (1994)<sup>14</sup> stance that authenticity is a cultural and experiential value. This paper argues that, when applied with thoughtfulness and sensitivity, contrast is a powerful tool for

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<sup>6</sup> ICOMOS, Venice Charter.

<sup>7</sup> Steven W. Semes, *The Future of the Past: A Conservation Ethic for Architecture, Urbanism, and Historic Preservation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, 139-160.

<sup>9</sup> Damla Mısırlısoy, “New Designs in Historic Context: Starchitecture vs. Architectural Conservation Principles,” *Civil Engineering and Architecture* 5, no. 6 (2017): 207–14.

<sup>10</sup> “ArchDaily,” AD Classics: Louvre Pyramid / I. M. Pei.” accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.archdaily.com/>

<sup>11</sup> “ArchDaily,” Columba Museum / Peter Zumthor, accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.archdaily.com/>

<sup>12</sup> “Divisare”, Salt Galata, Istanbul, accessed 8 May 2026, <https://divisare.com/>

<sup>13</sup> ICOMOS, Venice Charter.

<sup>14</sup> ICOMOS, Nara Document on Authenticity.

both the preservation and reinterpretation of the authentic character of cultural heritage, combining these principles with more contemporary understandings of contextualized and ethical design.

## **2. Methodology**

This study examines the ethical use of contrasts in contemporary architectural works carried out in historic buildings, using a qualitative, interpretive, multi-case study approach. This approach is well suited to investigating how architectural factors influence the sense of authenticity, as it focuses on meaning-making rather than statistics.

This research adopts a value-oriented analytical perspective informed by developments in the field of heritage studies, where the view that heritage is socially constructed and constantly evolving is embraced<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, the aim of this research is not necessarily to achieve generalizable results, but rather to develop an interpretive approach aimed at exploring opposition as an ethics-based design practice.

### **2.1 Case Study Selection**

The research uses a purposive sampling technique in order to find case studies that serve as examples of different types of architectural contrasts. The selection includes three of the world's most recognized buildings: Louvre Pyramid by I.M. Pei in 1989, Kolumba Museum by Peter Zumthor in 2007, and Salt Galata by Han Tümertekin in 2011.

The principles of selection include:

- Diversity of contrast methods (radical, atmospheric, and functional)
- Their relevance to the issues of conservation and frequent references to them in architectural literature
- Documentation materials (drawings, photos, and analysis)

The use of such a sample allows for a comparative analysis of the relation between different types of contrast and ethics in the context of heritage.

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<sup>15</sup> Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2013).

## 2.2 Data Collection Methods

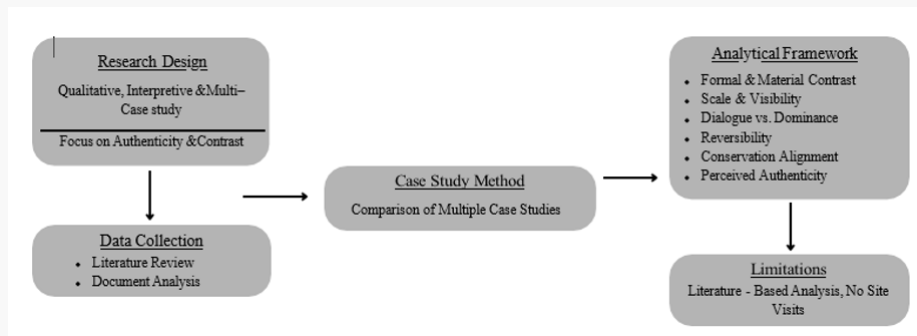


Figure 1: Research Framework Diagram (Prepared by the author)

The methodology, apart from international conservation charters and architectural theory, also draws on recent applied research in heritage documentation and material integrity. Karataş and Alptekin<sup>16</sup> show that inappropriate material interventions can compromise long-term integrity in historic structures; this again reinforces the need for ethically controlled contemporary additions.

This research focuses on how different architectural styles challenge or redefine the concept of authenticity. This makes its research design interpretive. This is mainly because it recognizes that authenticity is not an object-based quality but a quality that depends on context and is thus influenced by human perception and use. This means that it is possible to research not only architectural style but also how space affects authenticity (Fig.1). Two primary methods were employed:

**Literature Review:** The study drew on academic journals, published literature, theoretical texts, and global conservation texts. The major texts included are the Venice Charter (1964)<sup>17</sup>, the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)<sup>18</sup>, Frampton<sup>19</sup>, Semes<sup>20</sup>, Mısırlısoy, and Prysiazniuk.

**Document Analysis:** Architectural drawings and photographs of the three selected buildings were analyzed to comprehend the spatial and material aspects of the buildings. Analysis of the documents and publications about the three buildings reveals the significance of the buildings and the impact of architecture on society.

## 2.3 Analytical Criteria for Ethical Contrast

To maintain a consistent methodology, the current study employs an analytical framework grounded in the concept of ethical contrast. Unlike a mere descriptive checklist, this framework serves

<sup>16</sup> Karataş, Lale. "Investigating the Historical Building Materials with Spectroscopic and Geophysical Methods: A Case Study of Mardin Castle." *Turkish Journal of Engineering* 7, no. 3 (2023): 266–278.

<sup>17</sup> ICOMOS, Venice Charter.

<sup>18</sup> ICOMOS, Nara Document on Authenticity.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Frampton, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," *Perspecta* 20 (1983): 147–62.

<sup>20</sup> Semes, Steven W. "'Differentiated' and 'Compatible': Four Strategies for Additions to Historic Settings." *Forum Journal National Trust for Historic Preservation* 21, no. 4, (2007):14-25.

as an interpretive tool that bridges the gap between theory and empirical research. These five criteria are given in Table 1.

Analytical Criterion	Description	Ethical Reference
<b>Formal and Material Contrast</b>	It examines how contemporary forms, materials, and construction techniques differ from historical fabric without imitating it, and ensures the legibility of historical fabrics.	Venice Charter (1964): distinguishability; Semes (2007) <sup>21</sup> : differentiation over imitation; TSG (2010): clarity and legibility
<b>Scale and Visibility of the Intervention</b>	It evaluates the proportional relationship and visual significance of new additions to the historical structure and architectural hierarchy.	Venice Charter (1964); TSG (2010): impact on setting and architectural hierarchy
<b>Dialogue versus Dominance</b>	The contemporary intervention is evaluated to determine whether it establishes a respectful dialogue with the historical context or whether it dominates it architecturally.	Nara Document (1994): cultural context and spirit
<b>Reversibility of New Additions</b>	It analyzes the possibility of removing or modifying new interventions without causing irreversible damage to the historical fabric.	Venice Charter (1964): principle of reversibility
<b>Ethical Alignment with Conservation Charters</b>	Each case study is compared with international protection principles related to minimal intervention, originality, and cultural meaning.	Venice Charter (1964); Nara Document (1994)

**Table 1:** Analytical Criteria for Comparative Content Analysis

## 2.4 Limitations of the Methodology

This study has several limitations. The analysis is based on a limited number of case studies and primarily relies on documentation rather than fieldwork or user-based evaluation; therefore, the findings should be understood as interpretative rather than universally generalizable. Future research can expand the scope by incorporating user perception studies, additional case studies, and cross-cultural comparisons.

## 3. Theoretical Framework: Ethics, Authenticity, And Contrast

In recent years, debates about contemporary architectural additions to historic buildings have increased exponentially. These debates have focused on issues such as moral obligation, compatibility,

<sup>21</sup> Semes, *The Future of the Past*, 165-177.

and truthfulness. The discussion has been framed by various theoretical perspectives on restoration, authenticity, and intervention. The concept of restoration, as approached by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc in a creative and interpretive manner, holds that the goal of restoration is to complete a building in a unified state that may never have existed at any single moment in time, rather than simply preserving or repairing it. This approach thus argues that new additions can be made to the historic building as part of the whole and as an active role of architectural intervention<sup>22</sup>.

John Ruskin, however, was strictly preservationist in his approach. He rejected all new additions and restorations. Ruskin believed that ancient buildings should be preserved, even if that meant allowing them to age and decay naturally. According to him, any tampering endangered the actual remains of time and distorted any historical record that might have existed, thereby distorting history itself<sup>23</sup>.

Between these two opposing views, researchers such as Camillo Boito and Gustavo Giovannoni<sup>24</sup> proposed a more balanced approach. While rejecting stylistic imitations and decorative copies of historical forms, they accepted the necessity of contemporary interventions. Consequently, they shifted from stylistic imitation to broader considerations, including cultural meaning, material integrity, and contextual dialogue. According to this view, new additions should be clearly distinguishable from the original structure, and modern materials and construction techniques should be used to ensure the legibility and integrity of the architectural expression<sup>25</sup>. New architectural additions should be distinguishable from the historical fabric while respecting scale, proportion, and visual hierarchy<sup>26</sup>. Based on this discourse, Steven Semes argues that compatibility in new additions should be achieved through distinct difference rather than visual similarity. He contends that excessive similarity between the old and the modern can create perceptual uncertainty and ultimately compromise the authenticity of the past. He proposes that compatibility and difference are complementary ideas for describing this relationship. He then outlines four distinct design strategies for modern additions: intentional difference, abstract reference, inventiveness within the same or similar style, and exact duplication<sup>27</sup>. Deliberate contrast, linked to the principle of contrast, contends that contemporary architecture can express its temporal identity while upholding moral coherence with historical settings.

<sup>22</sup> Zeynep Ahunbay, *Tarihi Çevre Koruma ve Restorasyon* (İstanbul: YEM Yayın, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Doğan Kuban, "Sinan'ın Dünya Mimarisindeki Yeri", *Mimarbaşı Koca Sinan. Yaşadığı Çağ ve Eserleri 1* içinde (İstanbul:T.C. Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 1988), 581-624.

<sup>24</sup> Narmin Babazadeh Asbagh, "Theories of Conservation and Scientific Restoration from Gustavo Giovannoni's Point of View" (5th International Conference of Contemporary Affairs in Architecture and Urbanism (ICCAUA-2022), 11-13 May 2022; Giulia Mezzi, "Camillo Boito: Restoration of Monuments and Cultural Heritage Conservation in Post-Unification Italy" (PhD diss., University of Reading, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Tomlan and Jukka Jokilehto, "A History of Architectural Conservation," *APT Bulletin* 35 (2004): 78–79.; Glasgow Urban Laboratory, *New Design in Historic Settings* (Glasgow: Historic Scotland, 2010), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Anne E. Grimmer and Kay D. Weeks, *New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Semes, "Differentiated and Compatible," 17-23.

Zeren<sup>28</sup> examines the development of new structures and additions within historical contexts from a broader cultural perspective. She emphasizes that ethical design decisions should also consider the historical memory embedded in the location and the architectural form. Such an approach reinforces the idea that modern interventions should not impose a single character on the architecture but should instead facilitate the perpetuation of cultural meaning. Contemporary intervention in the architectural conservation process is as much a philosophical and ethical choice as a technical application. This section will cover the ideas of ethics, dynamic authenticity, and the strategy of design as a cohesive whole.

Studies published recently in national and international scientific journals once again reinforce the ethical and scientific issues related to the recent interventions in the historic environment. Sağlam and Tavşan<sup>29</sup> highlight the importance of assessing the new additions according to both formal and conceptual criteria, as “compatibility cannot be limited to a single criterion such as ‘similarities of forms’ only.”

At the same time, design guidelines in the form of New Design in Historic Settings produced by The Glasgow Urban Laboratory<sup>30</sup>, in their turn, emphasize the importance of ethical compatibility through clarity and responsiveness, as opposed to stylistic imitation, thus supporting the distinguishability and minimal intervention demands of the Venice Charter.

Nevertheless, the contemporary evolution of heritage discourse considerably undermines the conventional paradigm of conservation and preservation. Firstly, Critical Heritage Studies introduce a fundamental criticism of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), defined by Laurajane Smith (2006)<sup>31</sup> as the "dominant discourse of conservation" that is based on prioritizing the concepts of materiality, expertise, and monumentality. From such a standpoint, heritage is perceived as a universal feature of artefacts and objects associated with specific cultural communities, preserved by institutional authorities and professionals.

Critical Heritage Studies redefine heritage as a socially constructed and performative concept. According to Smith (2006), heritage is not a "thing" but a cultural practice whereby communities attribute certain meanings to the past within the context of the present moment. In particular, the approach under discussion challenges the conventional focus on material fabric as a basis for authentic heritage and shifts the emphasis to identity-related and power-related processes.

Developing this point of view further, Rodney Harrison (2013) presents heritage as an assemblage of relationships between the past, the present, and the future. Later, Harrison et al. (2020) stress that heritage is essentially focused on the future and emphasizes the need to develop potential

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<sup>28</sup> Mine Tanaç Zeren, *Tarihi Çevrede Yeni Ek ve Yeni Yapı Olgusu: Çağdaş Yaklaşım Örnekleri* (İstanbul: Yalın Yayıncılık, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Kübra Sağlam and Cengiz Tavşan, “Tarihi Çevrede Çağdaş Eklerin Biçimsel ve Kavramsal Kriterlere Bağlı Karşılaştırılması,” *Yakın Mimarlık Dergisi* 3, no. 1 (2019): 48–62.

<sup>30</sup> Dennis Rodwell, “‘New Design in Historic Settings’ Book Review,” *Context* 124 (2012).

<sup>31</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006).

scenarios of the future in addition to preserving the past. Thus, architectural interventions could be perceived as agents in this process.

In a similar vein, Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2015)<sup>32</sup> emphasize that values ascribed to heritage can be highly contested, and different social groups can assign different meanings to the same heritage object. Such an approach challenges the notion of heritage as having intrinsic value and suggests that there should be greater reflexivity about what values we use when conserving heritage sites.

On top of this, from the viewpoint of value-based analysis, Randall Mason<sup>33</sup> goes further to explain that heritage significance is a construction based on evaluation and negotiation of values and priorities. This means that conservation actions involve complex processes of value comparison and negotiation.

Consequently, when these various approaches to the analysis of heritage are taken into account, it becomes evident that heritage is inherently intertwined with cultural, political, and temporal dynamics. Therefore, architectural interventions can no longer be viewed solely as physical changes made to historic architecture and as new aesthetics created by the interveners.

As a result, the ethical evaluation of interventions cannot focus solely on formal characteristics and physical aspects. Instead, we must acknowledge that interventions are part of the culture that constructs meaning, identity, and memory. Within this expanded theoretical context, three interrelated concepts become central to the study: ethics, authenticity, and contrast.

### 3.1. Ethics

In conservation, following ethics isn't only about acting in line with the rules; it's about making moral decisions in accordance with cultural values. This is covered in the Venice Charter: "Any intervention will have to result in preserving the original architectural structure and will end when assumptions are made." Legibility is the key ethical criterion here; to avoid the "destruction of history", modern additions must be easily discernible from the historical fabric.

"Stylistic imitation" is the primary ethical term, as introduced by Semes, and it holds that when one tries to repeat the past, it compromises the purity of the original work. Hence, the ethical responsibility requires the modern vocabulary of architecture to owe a certain homage to the past edifice in order to maintain its supremacy at least in its time. According to Prysiazhniuk<sup>34</sup>, this is the responsibility of the modern generation in terms of preventing the erasure of the past.

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<sup>32</sup> Emma Waterton and Steve Watson, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Randall Mason, "Fixing Historic Preservation: A Constructive Critique of 'Significance,'" *Places* 16, no. 1 (2004): 64–71.

<sup>34</sup> Oleksii Prysiazhniuk, "Museology and Monument Protection in the Discourse of French National Identity". *The role of history and archaeology in the aspects of the development of the modern world içinde* (Lviv – Torun: Liha-Pres, 2019), 68-90.

### 3.2 Authenticity

The concept of authenticity has begun to evolve from a rigid focus on physical materials toward a more holistic understanding. Whereas earlier conservation movements prioritized the “material reality,” the Charter on Authenticity<sup>35</sup> shifted the paradigm by recognizing that authenticity lies in form, design, use, and even “spirit and feeling”.

This shift has brought a more flexible approach to interventions. If authenticity is dynamic rather than static, a contemporary addition can be viewed as a new “layer” of history. Frampton contributes to this debate from a tectonic perspective, arguing that a building's authentic value lies in its construction and the honesty of its material expression. From this perspective, an intervention is authentic as long as it remains faithful to its own materials and structural logic, rather than hiding behind historical masks

### 3.3 Contrast

Contrast is the strongest contextual background for the ethical and original ideas described above. It is a deliberate mechanism for indicating differences between periods. Yet the act of contrasting itself is a form of continuity. Some studies distinguish between “dialogue” and “dominance.” When effective contrast is achieved, it fosters dialogue, in which the new quality highlights the older attributes rather than overtaking them. Problems arise, however, when the contrast is “self-centered,” with architectural splendor taking precedence over heritage significance. According to Semes, this results in the “new” becoming more visibly prominent at the expense of the “old,” relegating the historic monument to the role of background scenery in the new drama of exposure. In its practical, ethical applications, the consideration of contrast therefore requires the strictest attention to size, material, and reversibility.

### 3.4 Definition of Ethical Contrast

Following the previous discussion on the topic, the notion of ethical contrast is defined as a design practice that preserves the integrity and importance of historical architecture through contemporary intervention, which can be distinguished from the old yet does not lose the cultural value of the latter.

In other words, ethical contrast is perceived not as a specific stylistic approach but as an evaluative one. Thus, ethical contrast is achieved in case the following conditions are observed:

- Distinguishable difference between the old and the new (legibility)
- Appropriate scale, proportions, and hierarchy of architectural elements
- Creation of interaction rather than domination
- Minimum physical intervention that is reversible

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<sup>35</sup> ICOMOS, Nara Document on Authenticity.

- Contribution to cultural continuity

#### 4. Case Studies

This study discusses the ethical application of the principle of contrast in modern extensions to historic buildings, using three case studies: The Louvre Pyramid in Paris, the Kolumba Museum in Cologne, and Salt Galata in Istanbul. These examples demonstrate how context-specific modern extensions manage originality through contrast.

##### 4.1. Louvre Pyramid (I. M. Pei, 1989)

The Louvre Pyramid is probably one of the most controversial and ultimately most successful examples of "radical contrast" in architectural history.

###### a. Form and Material Contrast



**Figure 2:** Contrast between the transparent glass pyramid and the historic stone facades of the Louvre Palace. (Verner Johnson, Museum Architects.)

Where the Baroque and Classical facades of the Louvre Palace symbolize the substantial mass of history, the weight of stone, and the intensity of adornment, Pei's pyramid views this richness as a "emptiness" design (Fig. 2). As Pei puts it, "this structure does not belong here, but it belongs to this time," using steel and glass. The transparent surface of the pyramid (Fig. 3) reflects the surrounding ancient facades and the ever-changing sky. In other words, the pyramid is not an object in itself but a lens framing the palace.



**Figure 3:** Material contrast between contemporary glass-steel construction and historic masonry. (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners)

#### **b) Impact on Authenticity**

The pyramid serves a practical function in the transformation of the Louvre Museum from a palace to a modern museum, apart from it being a decorative element. The palace had intricate wings that had no central entrance. Pei dealt with the courtyard, or Cour Napoléon, of the building. In actuality, the pyramid was the skylight of a massive underground lobby. The architect created a "invisible" surface underneath the courtyard, considering the pyramid a sculpture acting as a source of lighting for the system, which is appropriate in this case, as it did not alter the original rooms of the building (Fig 4).



**Figure 4:** Visual dominance of the historic wings preserved through the transparency of the contemporary intervention.(Vincent Brière, 2022.)

### c) Ethical Assessment

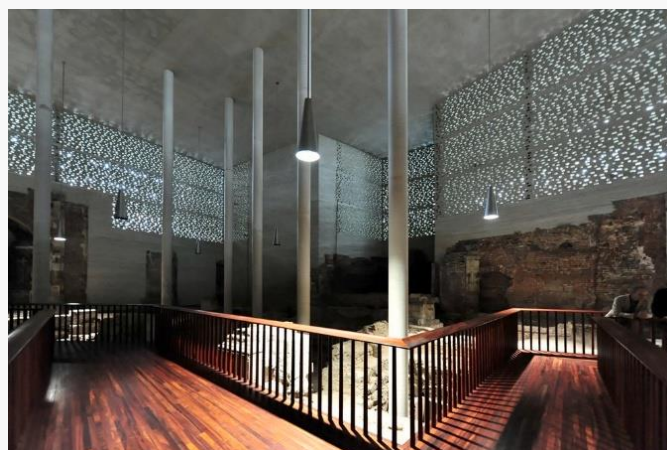
The pyramid has enhanced the Louvre Museum's visibility rather than compromising its historical authenticity. The Cour Napoléon was a parking lot and an empty lot before the pyramid was built. By creating a central space that connects the palace's wings, it has redefined the museum's vast scale. According to the "Nara Document," this project brought back "the spirit" of the building without sacrificing its substance, meaning its stones. Contrast is no longer a formal disagreement but a sincere dissimilarity (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5:**Public circulation and spatial continuity enabled by the contemporary intervention. (The Good Life France, 2012.)

#### 4.2. Kolumba Museum (Peter Zumthor, 2007)<sup>36</sup>

The Kolumba Museum was built on the site of a church destroyed in World War II. Through a construction method that avoids placing the new walls directly on the old stones, Zumthor creates a "distant contrast" (Fig. 6). The new bricks retain their formal differences even though they remain the same color as the ancient stones.



**Figure 6:**Relationship between historic ruins and contemporary brick walls in the Kolumba Museum. (ArchDaily, Jose Fernando Vazquez)

<sup>36</sup> "ArchDaily." Columba.

### a) Form and Material Contrast

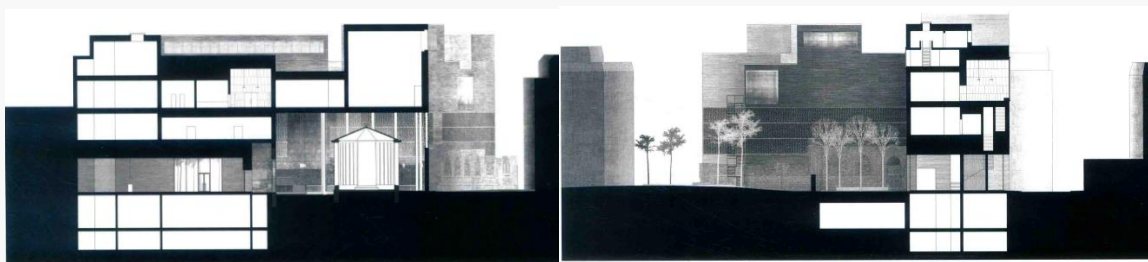
Whereas the obvious and overt nature of the contrast seen in the Louvre Pyramid involves a strong visual statement, the Kolumba Museum is based on a more subdued and subtle technique that makes use of contrast. The contemporary architecture created by the use of special Kolumba bricks reflects the chromatics of the ruined architecture without imitating it or providing an opposition to it. Rather, there is a delicate balance formed through texture and layers.

In particular, the perforated brick walls are the key elements in the concept of contrast in the building in question. As a result of the material used, there is some transparency of the walls, which makes the architectural elements communicate in terms of light, air, and space between indoor and outdoor environments. In other words, it is an element of porosity, rather than enclosure of the historical ruin elements.

### b) Impact on Authenticity

The concept of authenticity at Kolumba is more multi-faceted. The structure combines layers of history dating back to ancient Roman ruins, ruins of a Gothic church, and even modifications and other constructions, allowing all of this to be kept in one building. Unlike restoring some previous period, architect Zumthor decides to embrace the fragmentary aspect of the building, making it part of its identity.

This approach to conservation finds expression even in the very structure of the building. People move through different rooms which provide an insight into certain historical epochs, while stressing the idea that memory and absence, rather than presence, are important. This layered spatial relationship, in which new structural elements remain distinct yet interconnected with the historic remains, can be clearly observed in section (Fig. 7). In accordance with the Nara Document, the idea of authenticity at Kolumba includes not only physical elements but cultural ones as well.



**Figure 7:** Architectural sections as a spatial narrative of memory and continuity.  
(20th Century Architecture)

### c) Ethical Assessment

The most striking feature of the museum is the "perforated" walls surrounding the ruins (Fig. 6). These permeable walls allow natural light and air to pass through. Rather than being preserved in a locked museum box, the ruins have been conserved as if in a living archaeological park, retaining their connection with the outside world. Here, the architect developed a "cover" that protects the ruins while

allowing them to breathe, rather than covering them with a design like a "lid". This case is intended to illustrate the concept of the "ethical limits of intervention" in research. For Kolumba, the death of a building is part of its own story rather than some sort of flaw or imperfection.

Moreover, if we consider recyclability, new walls are independent and not erected directly on top of existing remnants. In this way, there is less interaction with the existing structure that could compromise its integrity. This achieves an ethical distance. In this project, contrast is used to honor each aspect of the past within one and the same hierarchical order, rather than separating past from present. "I came here to protect this place" is the contrast at Kolumba, whereas "Look, I'm here" is that at Louvre. This is the physical embodiment in the Nara Document itself of the principle of "cultural context and spirit" (spirit and feeling).

### **4.3 Salt Galata (Han Tümertekin, 2011)<sup>37</sup>**

The Salt Galata intervention transforms Alexandre Vallaur's 1892 Ottoman Bank building from a "financial fortress" into a "public library" by using contrast to achieve spatial clarity.

#### **a) Form and Material Contrast**

Salt Galata exemplifies an ordered approach to contrast as a design strategy. The design intervention incorporates modern elements like glass, steel, and light constructions into the historical stone building, thus providing an appropriate, yet restrained, contrast between the old and the new. Unlike the contrast that relies on form as seen in the Louvre Museum or the atmospheric experience as seen in Kolumba, the contrast used in Salt Galata is found in details and located in the interior of the building.

Such inserted items as stairs, partitions, and library constructions are treated as independent units and, therefore, do not integrate with the original structure. Han Tümertekin aimed to achieve a controlled contrast with the building's original stone architecture by using glass, steel, and transparent surfaces (Fig. 8) in the new additions. The precision, lightness, and transparency of these units provide for an additional layer of architecture and, thereby, create conditions under which contrast becomes historical.

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<sup>37</sup> "Divisare".

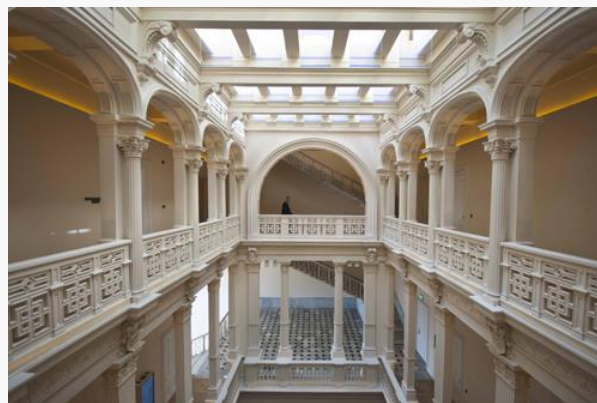


**Figure 8:** Controlled contrast between historic stone structure and contemporary transparent interventions. (Iwan Baan (2012))

### **b) Impact on Authenticity**

The design intervention retains the spatial layout of the building while ensuring that it meets modern needs. One of the key decisions made regarding the building was the stripping off of the subsequent poor quality extensions in order to uncover the structure with the steel framework and brick vaulting. This design solution improves the clarity of the building's history.

Authenticity should be considered not only in the preservation of materials used for construction but also in the preservation of spatial logic. Rather than redefining the building's identity, the interventions help in making it a place of culture and scientific work. Currently, authenticity lies in the contrast between the exposed and hidden and the new and old structures (Fig. 9).



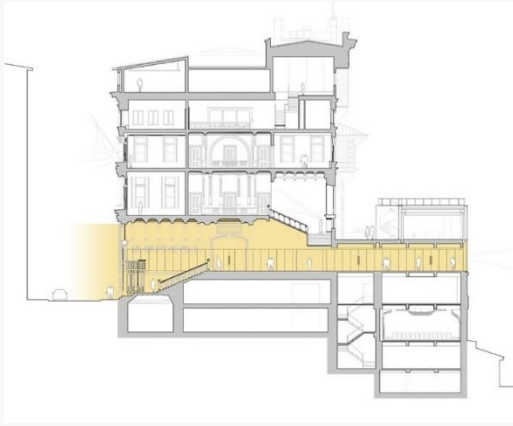
**Figure 9:** Detail of contemporary intervention demonstrating need-based contrast. (Arkitera, 2016)

### **c) Ethical Assessment**

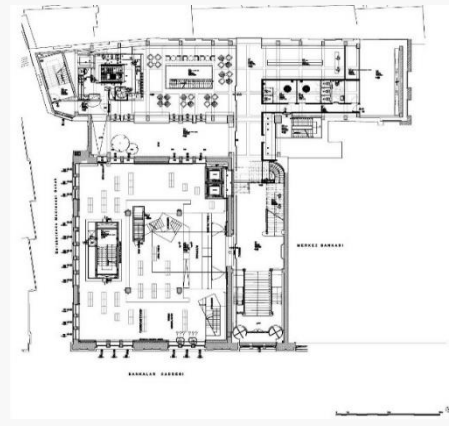
In Salt Galata, a practical and ethical approach is taken towards contrast in relation to necessity and reversibility. The additions have been made using temporary materials that can be removed at any time without causing any change to the building's structural integrity. In other words, without

affecting the primary construction of the building in any way, the use of the current fittings and flooring may only be considered as 'temporary furniture' at best (Fig. 10-11).

Contrast in this case does not come in the form of an architectural statement but as an infrastructural system that allows for new programs within the existing building. It neither comes into the field of excessive visibility nor does it merge with the existing building completely, thereby taking up an ethical middle ground position.



**Figure 10:**Section showing the spatial separation between original fabric and new interventions. (Mimarlar ve Han Tümertekin)



**Figure 11:**Floor plan illustrating reversible contemporary additions within the historic structure. (Arkitera, 2016)

## 5. Comparative Analysis

This section discusses the position that the three selected cases take in the architectural intervention spectrum regarding their ethical attitudes, degree of contrast, and impact on uniqueness.

### 5.1 Degrees of Contrast: From Visual Shock to Tactile Whisper

The cases examined will show that contrast is not just "difference," but rather a means of "intensity management."

- Louvre (Radical/Visual): Here, the radical/visual contrast is "shocking clarity." The transparency of the glass and the opacity of the palace create a clear temporal division between old and modern. Results indicate that the pyramid, having less mass than the palace, will create a visual hierarchy, and that's why such a stark contrast is nonetheless morally acceptable.
- Kolumba (Atmospheric/Textural): The contrast at Kolumba is part of a "sensory continuity," as opposed to the visual shock of the Louvre. In that case, the contrast becomes a "transition" (gradient) rather than a "line." It is only at touching distance that you can really appreciate the difference between the new brick and the old stone.
- Salt Galata (Restrained/Internal): "The contrast in this case is 'structural and functional,' more akin to what one finds in modern buildings than in minimal art... As in Salt Galata, at

Kolumba 'technological upgrades demonstrate an appreciation for modernity.' Even at Salt Galata, 'the contrast is hidden behind glass walls and steel shelves.' Indeed,".

### 5.2. Impact on Authenticity: Redefining or Pres

Approaches to the concept of authenticity determine the philosophical depth of the intervention.

- Louvre - Perceptual Authenticity: Instead of “preserving” authenticity, the Louvre "redefines" it. Before the Pyramids, the Louvre was a palace; after the Pyramids, it was transformed into a “modern museum”. The intervention introduced a strong 20th-century overlay without erasing the building's past.
- Kolumba - Memory Authenticity: Kolomba is “accepting authenticity with its scars,” as case studies describe. Zumthor brings memory into the new architecture, not hiding the destruction but incorporating it. In this case, authenticity refers not so much to the age of the material as to the “sorrow and the peace that this site evokes”.
- Salt Galata - Material and Functional Authenticity: At Salt Galata, preserving the structure’s spatial composition is essential to its authenticity. Meanwhile, its original stonework will never be at risk, since the subsequent addition is reversible. In fact, in the ethical model, this is the “safest” option.

### 5.3. The Ethical Question: Alignment between Purpose and Spectacle

The most important result of this research is that effective contrast serves the building's needs rather than the architect's signature, that is, purpose-driven rather than starchitecture.

- Iconic but Not Intrusive: Despite being iconic, the Louvre Pyramid serves as a practical solution to the subterranean logistical chaos.
- Modest but Characterful: Examples of buildings in which the architect's voice has not overpowered the building voice are Kolumba and Salt Galata.

In Table 2, a comparative analysis is conducted based on the three case studies to show contrasts in terms of contrast degree, authenticity, and ethics. In all three projects analyzed here, contrast is used as an ethical tool through which it becomes possible for the building to last, to breathe, and to adapt to its new role in the contemporary world rather than just “look different”. This is the smallest but most crucial difference between “ethical preservation” and “spectacular architecture”

Criteria	Louvre Pyramid	Kolumba Museum	Salt Galata
<b>Formal and Material Contrast</b>	Strong, explicit contrast	Subtle, textural contrast	Controlled, localized contrast
<b>Spatial Strategy</b>	Underground circulation, centralized	Layered and distant spatial sequencing	Interior insertions, adaptive reuse
<b>Impact on Authenticity</b>	Enhances legibility	Preserves layered memory	Maintains spatial continuity
<b>Ethical Approach</b>	Functional, non-invasive	Minimal, protective	Reversible, need-based
<b>Type of Contrast</b>	Radical / visual	Atmospheric / tactile	Functional / internal
<b>Degree of Contrast (Intensity)</b>	High (visual shock)	Medium (sensory transition)	Low (background contrast)
<b>Type of Authenticity</b>	Perceptual authenticity	Memory-based authenticity	Material & functional authenticity
<b>Purpose vs Expression</b>	Functional but iconic	Context-driven, restrained	Need-based, non-iconic

**Table 2.** Comparative Analysis of Contemporary Interventions in Historic Contexts

## 6. Discussion: When Is Contrast Ethical?

The study's examples show that the principle of contrast is neither morally right nor morally dubious in and of itself. The ethical importance of contrast depends on the intervention's purpose, scope, and mode of execution. When contrast prioritizes iconic exposure over historical context, it becomes an ethical issue.

In each of the three instances, ethical contrast was achieved by treating the modern intervention as a supplement to the historical framework rather than as an object that dominates it. The Louvre Pyramid creates a stark formal contrast, but because it serves a practical purpose and does not directly alter the ancient building, it is morally acceptable. Without altering the building's original rooms, the intervention created an underground organization.

The Kolumba Museum uses silence and distance rather than visibility to create contrast. Zumthor's method transforms the ideas of memory and destruction into a spatial narrative while preserving the predominance of historical layers. This position aligns with the Nara Document's definition of cultural and experiential authenticity.

In contrast, Salt Galata offers a needs-based strategy that falls between these two extremes. Despite using a modern language, the new additions do not alter the ancient structure's essence. The project complies with the ethical standards of the Venice Charter by preserving recyclability and the original spatial design.

Ultimately, ethical contrast is not a fixed design language; it is a context-sensitive decision-making process. Contrast becomes an ethical tool when it is treated as a fair discussion rather than a confrontation between the past and the present.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study explores ways in which the authenticity of historic buildings might be preserved or reinterpreted through the moral application of the concept of contrast in contemporary architectural interventions. The Louvre Pyramid, Salt Galata, and the Kolumba Museum serve as examples of how contrast need not endanger the historical setting. Conversely, when employed thoughtfully and respectfully, contrast may create a meaningful architectural dialogue between the old and the modern, highlight chronological contrasts, and reinforce the historical structure's identity.

Strength, composure, and compliance are among the many contrasts each case study offers. It is therefore accepted that, rather than impairing the historical texture, all three strategies tend to strengthen it. While Kolumba Museum seamlessly merged memories and modern space through a calm, light-filled contrast, Salt Galata reused the structure with a functional contrast that preserved the original materials, and the Louvre Pyramid boldly reordered the classic complex through transparency.

The research indicates that, for ethical reasons, contrast requires uniqueness, restraint, understanding of context, and recognition of value for what it is, all of which align with the Venice Charter Requirements (1964) and the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994). In such situations, contrast becomes a means to an end for preservation and reinterpretation rather than a measure of superiority through the artistic means of aesthetic contrast. The research indicates that contrast can be an ethical rather than an aesthetic method of design, despite relying on a limited number of case studies and document assessments.

In conclusion, the research shows that, when applied with care, contrast enables historical structures to maintain their active, legible, and meaningful presence in contemporary settings. It also allows the past and present to coexist without conflict, in a constructive manner that fosters continuity rather than disruption.

### **7.1. Key Findings and Comparative Conclusions**

#### **7.1.1. Based on Case Studies**

##### **a) Louvre Pyramid**

- Demonstrates that radical visual contrast can be ethically acceptable when driven by functional necessity
- Preserves material authenticity by avoiding direct intervention in the historic structure
- Enhances legibility through spatial reorganization rather than physical alteration

**b) Kolumba Museum**

- Illustrates that restrained and atmospheric contrast can reinforce memory and cultural continuity
- Maintains authenticity through layered spatial experience rather than material preservation alone
- Represents an ethical model based on minimal intervention and structural independence

**c) Salt Galata**

- Shows that functional and reversible contrast can support adaptive reuse
- Preserves spatial and material authenticity through minimal and controlled insertions
- Demonstrates how contemporary needs can be integrated without redefining historical identity

**7.1.2. Based on International Conservation Principles**

**a) Venice Charter (1964)**

- All three projects demonstrate the principle of distinguishability between old and new
- Reversibility is most clearly implemented in Salt Galata
- Minimal intervention is strongly reflected in Kolumba

**b) Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)**

- Louvre → supports perceptual authenticity
- Kolumba → emphasizes experiential and memory-based authenticity
- Salt Galata → preserves material and functional authenticity



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