Relocating Place: The implications of moving architecture

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Session 2017-18.
Abstract

Beginning in antiquity, pieces of buildings were taken as spolia, transported hundreds of miles, and incorporated into the architecture of other towns and cities. Since then, whole buildings have been moved, rather than razed, for reasons ranging from housing development to transportation revision. Relocating a historic building, although a controversial form of conservation, can potentially become the only alternative to demolition. Whether these structures become museum pieces, or are utilized or inhabited in a new site, relocation undeniably changes the original intent of the building. The question then arises: Can buildings that have been moved retain a sense of place? If so, how? If not, what role does planning play in re-establishing, or creating a new place? Sense of place is defined as the intrinsic feel of a site that makes it unique, and gives it character. It is not always apparent that a building has been historically moved, and in many cases society continues along as if the new location were the original. The building is familiar in the transplanted location, and therefore a sense of place can be assigned to the site by the modern users. A different conclusion is drawn when relocation is experienced. Sense of place is interrupted. This paper will explore relocation planning and the impact of moving historic architecture on a building’s sense of place based on the three characteristics of activity, form, and image.
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Introduction

“The moving of all or part of a monument cannot be allowed except where the safeguarding of the monument demands it or where it is justified by national or international interest of paramount importance.”
-ICOMOS Article 7

The concept of moving architecture is not new. Moving buildings is, however, not a common occurrence in the present day. Some buildings are able to be moved as a whole, while others must be dismantled and reassembled in a new site. Whether moved because of planned impending demolition, or threatened by natural causes, relocating a building is sometimes the only option available to those who wish to see its physical permanence retained.

In antiquity, it was common to relocate, remove, or reuse entire structures, or pieces of buildings. For example, it is speculated that columns found on one of the most well-known buildings in the world, the Pantheon in Rome, Italy, were taken from a nearby structure to complete the entrance. The practice was so popular that the word spolia was coined to describe just such a phenomenon. Spolia refers specifically to incorporating pieces from respected older buildings into new buildings, but the term is generally used to describe the reuse of building parts. It was not until modern attitudes desired to remember history as untouched and permanent that altering the state or appearance of historic buildings became unpopular, or at least controversial. Our concept of architecture as permanent is derived from interactions with antiquity, seeing buildings still standing which were built centuries ago, like the Colosseum in Rome, Italy (Figure 1). Iconic images of historic buildings are well circulated, and are recognizable to many, even if those individual people have never visited the site. In addition, people have a natural tendency to resist change, and this is partially manifested in our desire to maintain infrastructure.

Figure 1: The Colosseum, Rome, Italy (2010).

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1 Gregory (2008), online article
2 Jones, Mark Wilson, lecture 23/11/2017
3 Glendinning (2013), p. 15
4 Hornstein (2011), p. 81
5 Parfect & Power (1997), p. 30
In 1964, the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) published an Article under the Venice Charter which stated that buildings should only be moved if no other option for preservation is available. This and similar legislation, paired with our natural resistance towards change, make building relocation a controversial topic. “The dilemma for heritage professionals is that to accept relocation as an acceptable response to development pressure is to set a precedent that may tear apart the fragile network of regulations protecting our heritage of the future.” Therefore, the practice and the theory behind relocation of buildings as a viable form of conservation are at odds. This sentiment is shared by both planners and the public, who can be vocal about the impact relocation has on the authenticity of a building. This paper strives to help relocation to be viewed as a conservation opportunity, rather than an unfortunate end to the great life of a historic building.

As cities and towns grow and change in order to accommodate the needs of modern society, it is possible that moving buildings will become more popular. What may become challenging, but hopefully prove to be at the forefront of relocation decisions, is re-establishing meaningful contexts for moved buildings in their new sites. Buildings which have stood in one location for decades or even centuries have a sense of familiarity. Visitors form patterns of use and circulation in and around these buildings, and their appearance is recognizable. These buildings have a meaning to us. By relocating a building that meaning can be altered. These connections, however, are not as easily affected by changes made to a building as we might initially believe. The conservation industry must work to address how we can retain, re-establish, or create meanings, and more specifically places, with relocated historic buildings.

### Defining Place

“There’s no place like this place, anyplace!”

*Signage outside of Honest Ed’s Bargain Emporium, Toronto, Canada*

A “place” can be difficult to define. It is agreed upon in literature that space does not equal place. Space is the negative area between elements (physical members) of a site. Place is more complex, and considers not only the space between elements, but the elements themselves and the organization of the elements in a way that is meaningful. American urban planning theorist Kevin Lynch writes in *The Image of the City* (1960) that over time, each person develops his own image of where he is. When multiple persons have similar images, and all contribute meaning to that image, it creates a place. Definitions by other authors are very much in line with Lynch’s findings, and add that places are physical, cultural, and/or social locations where there is a shared identity. It is important to recognize the role people play in deciding whether a location has the characteristics or qualities of a place. Place is created by the intersection of activity, form, and image, and each of these characteristics is supported by a list of sub-criteria (Figure 2). Although understanding or having history with a location can help people to develop connections with a place, it is possible to use

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6 Gregory (2008), online article
7 Gregory (2008), online article
8 Lynch (1960), p. 8
9 Hornstein (2011), p. 95
12 Lynch (1960), p. 7
13 Project for Public Spaces (2009), webpage
intentional planning and design to assist in the creation of places by considering the activity, form, and image of a site.\textsuperscript{14}

![Venn diagram showing criteria for the definition of place.](image)

Project for Public Spaces (PPS), an international organization, provides planning and design consultation on improving public spaces and creating places.\textsuperscript{15} Research done by PPS suggests four characteristics of a successful place: sociability, uses & activities, access & linkages, and comfort & image (see Appendix I). PPS differentiates between “sociability” and “activity,” but the essential concept can be understood by interpreting activity as either being one of individual or social group actions. Therefore, this paper will move forward referring to a place as a group of elements subjectively having all or many of these characteristics.

Perhaps even more challenging is defining a sense of place. Sense of place has been described as an intrinsic feeling, rather than an empirical fact. Once people share a common image of a location, and that image gains importance and meaning, it is considered special. “Having a sense of place is understanding that place as special, whether one can verbalize why or not.”\textsuperscript{16} It is important to raise the point that the people for whom a place holds meaning do not need to be related, or interact with each other, although associated individuals in a set community may also create a place together. A church community, for instance, where users are connected by participation in similar and meaningful activities, make the church a place. Places become special to the users, whether or not those users can express a reasoning for why. It should be noted, however, that two individuals or groups may not share a sense of place for a location. Even if said church is meaningful to some individuals, it may not be special to passersby. A sense of place is dependent on the experiences and feelings of an individual, although often multiple people share the same sentiments which leads to the popularity of a place.

\textsuperscript{14} Woods (accessed 2017), webpage
\textsuperscript{15} More information on Project for Public Spaces can be found at pps.org
\textsuperscript{16} Woods (accessed 2017), webpage
There are many locations throughout the towns and cities we live in that are places. Only some of these places immediately exude their presence through their activity, form, and image. Places can be large or small, public or private, but some of the most distinctive places have some form of an enclosure. Enclosures, which can range from streets delineating space to fences and hedges, provide a visual separation and make a place definable.\(^{17}\) Although not all places are enclosed, enclosure can add a sense of comfort and safety, increasing the level of attachment we have to a place.\(^{18}\)

Historic buildings are more likely to become places than modern works. It is often found that new buildings are far less successful than older buildings when judged on the characteristics of place.\(^{19}\) The lifespans of these structures allow people to become familiar with, and develop histories and patterns of use in and around, historic buildings. Differences in materials, designs, and construction techniques help historic buildings to be unique and recognizable. It is shown that “older buildings are statistically...an important component of the distinctiveness of a place’s urban design.”\(^{20}\) Sometimes a distinctive building can be preserved, but at the cost of location. When this is the case, creating places should be at the forefront of the minds of conservation professionals as a tool to preserve buildings and their meanings.

Re-establishing Place

“We lose sight/site of places when we are no longer before them, yet the images of them are waiting to be retrieved: remembered, or imagined, in another place.”

-Shelley Hornstein\(^{21}\)

It should not be expected that cities and towns will be stagnant in order to retain their historic infrastructure. With this in mind, historic buildings should be treated as re-useable resources in development planning.\(^{22}\) What may no longer be fit for a particular location may find a new home feet or miles away. A place is comprised of activity, form, and image. These three characteristics are almost impossible to separate, and when combined form meaning. Lynch argues that meaning is more difficult to manipulate or change than the identity or structure of a place. Even if meaning is not lost when moving a building, it would be difficult to argue that when a building is relocated it retains its sense of place. By physically removing the structure from its site, the entire context of the building is affected. Renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright once wrote “A building grows out of conditions, like a plant out of soil.”\(^{23}\) Buildings are built to be site-specific, and moving a building can have an impact on all aspects of place. The goal of relocation, along with conservation of the building, should be to celebrate the building as an important element of a re-established, or new, place.

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\(^{17}\) Kaplan, et al. (1998), p. 119

\(^{18}\) Kaplan, et al. (1998), p. 119

\(^{19}\) Kent (2012), online article

\(^{20}\) Powe (2016), p. 169

\(^{21}\) Hornstein (2011), p. 6

\(^{22}\) Regeneration Through Heritage (1999), p. 7

\(^{23}\) Arrhenius, et al. (2014), p. 116
The most crucial component of forming a sense of place in relocated buildings is a sympathetic site. Although empty sites are few and far between in our growing and densifying urban fabric, it is important that care is taken when choosing a new site. By choosing a location which complements the historic building it is possible to begin to assign contemporary value to the building.\footnote{Regeneration Through Heritage (1999), p. 19} Referencing the characteristics of a place, this contemporary value must be concerned with the activity, form, and image of the building \textit{in its new site}. Figure 3 shows a model of the historic and present locations of the famously relocated Abu Simbel Temple in Egypt. On the lower part of the model, the ancient temple can be seen carved into the cliff face, and in close proximity to the water. Great care was given to preserve the image, form, and original materials of the temple. The present day location, which is directly above the historic location, also retains the temple’s historic proximity to the water. The temple’s status as a tourist destination has been maintained, if not enhanced by the publicity of the engineering feat. Overall, the relocation of this complex and unique set of structures in a similar setting accomplishes retention of a sense of place that is almost undiscernible from the original.

![Figure 3: A model shows the historic and present locations of the Abu Simbel Temple, Egypt.](image)

Slight, undetectable changes in location may be ideal, but this is almost never possible. Large projects or changes in a cityscape are often the cause of building relocation. In order to make way for such projects historic buildings are moved to new sites, in a layout and location that may have little connection to the original intentions of the architects and builders. Figure 4 shows the Henton Tin Chapel, a small structure which was relocated from its original village site to the Chiltern Open Air Museum, Buckinghamshire, England. The chapel was moved in order to avoid demolition.\footnote{Chiltern Open Air Museum, webpage} Although it has been placed in an exhibit setting, rather than integrated into the fabric of another part of the village, it is important to note the seemingly low level of attention given to the new site of the building. The chapel has been placed along a path, where there is a set entrance and exit route, next to buildings from other towns and time periods. Besides being physically set next to the neighboring buildings, the chapel has no relation to the buildings and their uses. The new site lacks activities, fluid circulation routes, and connections to the surrounding elements set in the space. These factors lead the chapel to become a shell of a building, and a structure that acts more as a set piece than a place.
In order to begin the process of re-establishing places using historic buildings, it is of utmost importance that placemaking be considered a goal throughout relocation planning. Although people instinctively recognize a need for places and a sense of place, planners often do not include place as a part of the discussion. Conservationists and planners will need to ask a series of questions in order to understand the possibility that a site being considered will be appropriate for a historic building. Although each of the three aspects of place are addressed individually below, these characteristics can only be understood as intertwined with, and dependent upon, each other. It is important to conduct research in order to understand the role a building plays in its current place (if it is indeed considered to be an element of a place), or location, and the potential to retain, re-establish, or create a role in a new site.

Firstly, planners must understand the potential activities that could take place in and around the building. For place to be established, a level of interaction is necessary beyond simply a visual experience. Stakeholders should ask if the building could provide opportunities for engagement, either for individuals or for groups. What activities are suitable for the place? Are the historic activities associated with this place still possible in the new site? Is there public space? Are there places to rest, or interact? How can this building help form space(s) on the site? Although it has been established that not all spaces are places, it becomes important to note that it is the spaces framed by buildings and enclosures that people use and within which we interact. We enjoy places because they allow for continued exploration, no matter their size or familiarity. People choose to actively use places where productive or beneficial activities take place.

Next, consider the form of the building. Form can be difficult to differentiate from image. Form is based purely on the physicality of the structure or place, while image takes into consideration how form is perceived or understood. In terms of planning for form, is the building positioned along circulation routes? Can the building become a part of, or help to form, a node (junction)? Is the site accessible? Is the building fit to the human scale? Form is heavily influenced by a building’s relationship to other features and elements in the site. Planners must consider the role of the building in its original location. Is the building considered a landmark? Can the building become a landmark in its new site? Form appears to be the most subliminal aspect of place, since image is easily captured in photographs, and activities are intentionally carried out. It is form, however, which heavily impacts understanding and meaningfulness of a site, and therefore this aspect deserves particular attention in the planning process.

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26 Kent (2012), online article
27 Gerrard (2014), p. 23
30 See Figure 2
Finally, planners must consider the image created in the new place. Does the building remind people of anything? Can the historic building be identified and understood from a distance? Does the building stand out as an individual, yet not visually out of place next to neighboring elements? Can the building fit into the existing pattern of the area? Image can often influence whether the onlooker likes the look of the building. Image directly affects preference because it incorporates the way a building makes us feel, think, and what information is presented to the viewer through the visuals created by the building. As a highly visual culture, image plays an important role in our first impressions of a place, and impacts whether or not we choose to begin to engage.

Planners must first identify what gives each building a sense of place, and makes it special. Then, work can commence on finding an appropriate site which will enhance (although possibly re-interpret) but not erase these features. If place is lacking in the original location, effort should be made to take advantage of the opportunity for a place to be created. Despite all of the research that has been done to define places by characteristics, it is ultimately the users who decide whether a space is a place, or not. An immense amount of planning could be dedicated to the aesthetics and layout of elements, only to find that the site is never used in the way intended. Conversely, places can be formed out of unlikely spaces. Places simply require a shared image and interest, held by individuals or a community, in order to be special.

31 Reference Figure 2
Case Studies

“Of all the many elements that comprise our surroundings, the buildings of the past are amongst the most powerful when it comes to creating places of character.”
-Pam Alexander

The following case studies have been chosen because they show a sample of relocation projects carried out for the purpose of conservation. These examples range from slight to drastic change, and assist in illustrating efforts to retain, re-establish, and create places.

Belle Tout Lighthouse, East Sussex, England

Important aspects of place before relocation: proximity to cliff side, solidarity in landscape, natural setting, popularity of image

The Belle Tout Lighthouse is a Grade II listed structure on the southern coast of England. Built in 1832, the lighthouse has undergone a series of renovation projects since being damaged in World War II. Continued interest in the building since its construction has conserved this lighthouse and its history. After being used as a family home, the site was restored, owned, and used by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the filming of a mini-series, which helped the lighthouse become widely recognizable. Due to a deteriorating cliff side, and impending destruction of the lighthouse if left in place, the structure was moved 53 feet away from the cliff in 1999 (Figure 5).

The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1902, when a replacement lighthouse was built at the bottom of the cliff. The proximity of Belle Tout to the cliff face is an important aspect of its place. In history, a ship’s captain understood that he was too close to the cliffs if he could no longer see the light from the lighthouse. Erosion of the cliff face allowed the light to be seen from a much closer distance, and therefore did not do an adequate job of warning ships of danger. The eroding cliff side also threatened the security and stability of the structure itself. By relocating the lighthouse away from the cliff not only is the structure preserved, but so is the original intent of the building. This aspect of place was retained with the relocation of the lighthouse.

32 Regeneration Through Heritage (1999), p. 20
33 Belle Tout Lighthouse, webpage
34 Belle Tout Lighthouse, webpage
35 Belle Tout Lighthouse, webpage
36 Belle Tout Lighthouse, webpage
37 Belle Tout Lighthouse, webpage

Figure 5: The Belle Tout Lighthouse being moved in 1999.
After several changes in ownership, the Belle Tout Lighthouse was purchased and renovated in order to be used as a bed and breakfast resort. While retaining the original intent of the building through relocation, although not the original purpose, changes in use and available activities at the site have attracted many visitors per year. The site features outdoor seating, cliff-side paths, and exciting 360 degree views. Through the care of this place and continued planning efforts, the natural setting of the lighthouse and the building’s solidarity in the landscape have remained intact, while encouraging people to spend time both at the lighthouse and in the surrounding landscape.

The cliff continues to erode at an alarming rate. For this reason, the lighthouse has been placed on concrete runners to guide the lighthouse away from the cliff when it ultimately needs to be moved again.\(^{38}\) Understanding that the building will need to be continually relocated in the future is now a part of the Belle Tout Lighthouse heritage. This relocation project can act as a guiding example for retaining important aspects of place, while planning for and responding to change.

**Old Wellington Inn, Manchester, England**

*Important aspects of place before relocation: history of multiple uses, unique building architecture, communal use purpose, sited in popular area of town*

Originally located in a popular shopping area of Manchester, England known as “The Shambles,” the Old Wellington Inn narrowly escaped damage in World War II.\(^{39}\) In 1952 the building was listed as Grade II on the National Heritage List for England. The Inn remained relatively intact, having undergone multiple changes of use throughout its history, including periods as an optician’s office, a fly and tackle shop, and as a spirits merchant (seen in Figure 6).\(^{40}\) Located on a corner and along a main pedestrian thoroughfare, the Inn likely saw many visitors. In the 1970s it was decided that the building should be moved, rather than demolished, to make way for redevelopment of The Shambles. The Inn was relocated 300 meters (984 feet) to the north (Figure 7).\(^{41}\) This historic inn and public house is now the only Tudor style building in the Manchester city center, a designation which makes the building inherently unique in its setting.\(^{42}\)

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\(^{38}\) Belle Tout Lighthouse, webpage

\(^{39}\) Manchester History, webpage

\(^{40}\) Manchester History, webpage

\(^{41}\) Dixon (2010), webpage

\(^{42}\) Dixon (2010), webpage
No traces of the place that existed as The Shambles remain because of modern shopping blocks. A new place, Shambles Square, has been created with the current location of the Inn. The Inn was originally attached to a later building, Sinclair’s Oyster Bar. When moved, the buildings were set perpendicularly to each other, to form an “L” shape, creating an open square (Figure 8). Relocation of the Inn has re-established, as well as enhanced, the original features of place. By situating the Inn in a position facing an open courtyard, space is created for events, gatherings, and wayfinding. The square allows opportunity for outdoor seating and relaxation, which the original location of the Inn was lacking. Similar to the historic location the Inn sits at a junction, now bordered on one side by a busy road, and on another by a footpath between the highly visited shopping center, which replaced The Shambles, and Manchester Cathedral. The square is easily identifiable by the stand-out architecture of the Inn, which is unique but not inappropriate in the new site. In this example, planning of the new site provided great opportunity to re-establish some aspects of the historic sense of place, while increasing activity and celebrating the special character of the Inn.

Figure 8: The current site of the Inn forms Shambles Square, which exhibits many characteristics of place.

Town of Kiruna, Sweden

*Important aspects of place before relocation: connections to iron industry, eclectic groupings of buildings, proximity to industry, existing town layout/mapping*

Kiruna is located in the far northern region of Sweden, within the Arctic Circle. This small town was developed, and has been sustained, through the lucrative iron ore mine which borders the town. Continued mining leading to subsidence has caused the town to make the drastic decision to move in order to avoid structural damage and property loss. Plans and digital models of a new Kiruna show primarily new buildings, and all new roads and shop fronts. Only 20 buildings are on an official list to be dismantled and reassembled in new locations throughout the town. One such building is the Kiruna Kyrka, a wooden church built in 1912 (Figure 9). The church will be moved from its current location to “take pride of place in a new park.” It can only be assumed that care in planning has been taken in order to create a special, and hopefully meaningful place incorporating this unique church as a key element.

43 Wainwright (2014), article
44 White Arkitekter, webpage
45 Wainwright (2014), article
46 Wainwright (2014), article
Another example is the iron clock tower, which currently sits with the town hall in Kiruna (Figure 10). Architect’s models show the clock tower’s future location next to a new, modern town hall designed for the revamped city (Figure 11). In Kiruna it is not possible to retain a sense of place. The level of change occurring in the city means that although planners can reference historic aspects of place, they must ultimately design for new places to be created using familiar historic buildings. There is immense potential for meaningful places to be created with historic buildings as the stepping stones. Some characteristics of Kiruna can be emulated by incorporating connections to the iron industry, and preserving old landmarks. Despite maintaining some features of old Kiruna, the city’s redesign will impact important drivers of sense of place such as nodes, circulation routes, and familiar groupings of elements. It will be a challenge for planners to integrate cherished parts of old Kiruna into what is to become a new city.

Although the town will retain the same name, and a similar location, the amount of change (particularly due to the projected level of new development) means that places will be completely lost. This loss of existing places will happen slowly as buildings are relocated, and the primary areas of use move along with the town. Familiar buildings will be seen, but a meaningful context of these structures will need to be established. Memories associated with places will be altered, and overtime rewritten and reformed. Just as places are slowly lost in the old Kiruna, places will be created in the new town.
Perhaps the historic buildings of old Kiruna, such as the iron clock tower and Kiruna Kyrka, will become special beacons within the town; landmarks to be shared by both the realms of the old and new. Author and planner Jane Jacobs writes that focal points in cities and towns become focal points because they are radically different from their surroundings, whether that be in age, materials, or use. Kiruna’s historic buildings are likely to become focal points in the new Kiruna because they are inherently unique in their new planned context. There is potential for Kiruna’s residents to build upon the memories and experiences of old places to create new ones, but only time will reveal the impacts and outcomes of relocation.

Conclusion

“There is no final result, only a continuous succession of phases.”

- Kevin Lynch

The retention of historic buildings has many positive effects in addition to forming places. To briefly summarize the complexities of urban planning, economic value, sustainability, and place-making: “Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.” These buildings support sustainability and resiliency of a city or town. Historic buildings function as re-useable resources, and can play important roles in economic renewal. Historic buildings have been shown to encourage greater levels of pedestrian activity, and be associated with artistic residences and industries. It has already been established that historic buildings are highly likely to become, or contribute to, the formation of places. Many of the features of a successful place overlap with aspects of a resilient city, including legible image and social activity.

Whether place is planned, or occurs naturally, a strong sense of place encourages sensitive stewardship efforts for places on all scales. With thoughtful planning, benefits can come from moved historic buildings. These positive outcomes make the development of historic buildings into places appealing. If planning is done to assist or encourage a building to become a place it is more likely conservation of the building will continue, and the relocation of the building will be considered successful.

Revisiting the components of place as presented at the beginning of this paper it is important to emphasize that place can be retained, re-established, or created through careful consideration of the activity, form, and image of the historic building in its new site. The new site should support and complement the historic building, so that it is an integral element of the site, rather than a transplanted fixture. Even with planning and effort, places can be difficult to establish. Relocated buildings must in some ways start from scratch to become familiar again, yet still intriguing in their new sites. Conservationists and planners must continue to critique their own work, and strive to create meaningful places for people. Therefore, moving a building, although controversial and challenging, should be seen as a viable conservation approach, and an opportunity to bring a focus to, and breathe new life into, a historic structure. By enhancing spaces with historic buildings, we can create vibrant places for people to enjoy for years to come.

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47 Jacobs (1964), p. 241
48 Lynch (1960), p. 2
49 Jacobs (1964), p. 200
50 Regeneration Through Heritage (1999), ps. 7 & 19
51 Powe, et al. (2016), p. 169
52 Soofi (2016), p. 13
53 Woods (accessed 2017), webpage
References


Appendix I

*Place diagram*