

MONUMENTS AS HISTORIC DOCUMENTS OR A WORK OF ARCHITECTURE?

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INTRODUCTION

The Venice Charter is at present the only existing document that governs the treatment of historic buildings. It was introduced in 1964 with the following words: "Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage...It is our duty to hand them on in full richness of their authenticity."¹

The concern for a specific ethics of conservation is evident in the fifteen articles of the Venice Charter. According to which, architectural monuments are the cultural heritage of the world and their treatment should exclude any imitative reconstruction based on an historical style. To save damaged monuments, in full richness of their authenticity, it recommends their consolidation through *Anastylosis*. *Anastylosis*, in its original Greek sense, meant the re-constitution of fallen artifacts. The Charter re-defines *anastylosis* in its Article 15 as: the reassembling of existing but dismembered parts in a way that the material used for integration should always be recognizable...and must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the historic evidence. This process, with which contemporary conservers have consolidated several monuments around the world, creates a visual contrast between the old and the new materials. The Charter's quest for retaining the material authenticity of the monument is influenced by a view of architecture that values its ability and capacity to represent ideas.

Representation has always played a central role in the understanding of various art forms. But the view that values architecture for its ability and capacity to represent life only becomes explicit in the writings on architecture ever since the nineteenth century. There are at least three crucial and distinct phases that may occur in architectural representations:

1. First is the concern for expression in creating a representation; that is, the idea that whatever can be represented can also be expressed in concrete terms. This argument, which has given rise to the need for transparency in architecture,² requires any form of representation to occur only in figurative terms. The question that the theorist may address at this stage is: *how to ensure the expression of a representation in a work of architecture*; or, in the case of an architect, it is: *how to create in order to represent?*

2. The second phase deals with the content of a specific representation. It usually occurs with the awareness that any representation is based on the *relationship* between the material of representation and that which it represents. This relationship

can occur only by virtue of an "agreement" or mutual understanding between the creator of the representation and its receivers. The principle interest of this assumption, which has given rise to many symbolic theories of representation, lies in the relationship between the viewer and a specific aspect of the content of representation.

3. The third phase occurs with the awareness of the multiplicity in a viewer's interpretation of the representation. For every representation to occur the possibility of imitation must be replaced by the prospect of interpretation. This thesis underlies certain illusionist theories of representation³ and some linguistic theories of architecture.⁴ These theories focus on the relationship between the viewer's interpretation of the content of representation and the material object in which the representation is manifest. Whereas the figurative and symbolic theories of representation are interested in answering the question: *What is a representation and how does it relate to the viewer?*, the illusionist and linguistic theories ask the question: *How can one interpret the tangible aspects of a representation?*

When works of architecture are considered from the point of view of their capacity to represent ideas, there is a tendency to establish a scale of values based on social, religious, and political concerns; concerns that are specific in relation to those who will receive the represented image and not necessarily to those who created the representation.

The recommendations of the Venice Charter rule out all reconstruction work to damaged monuments, except *anastylosis*. In most cases of *anastylosis*, such as the Erectheum in Athens and Pergamum in Turkey, plastic stone is used. This is a mixture of mortar and white Portland cement which does not weather and retains its quality of "newness." When it is juxtaposed with the aged surface of these monuments, the recognition of the volume of elapsed time is ensured. One of the main problems of this process is that it radically alters the actual granular or fibrous composition of the old fabric which often becomes much stronger than it was when new. When the damaged fabric, composed of discrete and impervious particles, receives the injected grouting material, it converts into material with quite different properties. In time, this combination of different chemical properties results in the form of de-coloration of both the original fabric and the grouting material, possibly resulting in long term structural damage. However, the *anastylosis* of a few columns can give the viewer an indication of the spatial qualities of a collapsed building. This aspect of *anastylosis* opens itself to yet another problem. As noted by Bernard Fielding, *anastylosis* "may obliterate one phase of the development of a building at the expense of another."⁵

The Charter's justification of *anastylosis*, despite its

potential dangers, is based on its conviction that monuments have a message for the contemporary viewer. If it is damaged to the point that the viewer cannot comprehend that message then the conservator should proceed with anastylosis. At the same time, the Charter suggests that conservation must stop at a point where *conjecture* begins. In its aim to eliminate any form of interpretation the charters recommendations intend to guide the viewer's speculation about a specific aspect of the monument: its *age-value*. It defines the monument as follows:

"The concept of an historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or an historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time."

This aspect of the Charter has been criticized by those who detect an influence of European thoughts on a universal code of architectural conservation.⁶ While the advocates of the Charter demand a proof of its age from a monument, its critics question the wisdom of giving so much significance to the material antiquity of a monument.

In 1990, the national committees of the ICOMOS reassessed and re-affirmed the intentions of the Charter.⁷ Unfortunately, this debate posed a question that draws a line between eastern and western thoughts on the value of historical objects. It did not question the validity (in any given context) of the Charter's most critical aspect; that is, its definition of authenticity in conservation practice. During the discussion at Lousanne, a Swiss delegate stated the problem as follows: "...it has become noticeable that the European spirit which is at the origin of this text (the Venice Charter) made the implementation of certain principles difficult in the cultural context outside Europe, particularly for those who seek rather the continuity of the essence of their civilization than the physical preservation of objects which might be made of fragile building materials."⁸ This statement implies that within the cultural context of Europe, the continuity of the essence of a civilization is not an issue. It also suggests that the notion of authenticity is culture-specific and each culture has its own fixed concept of the monument. Both these implications are mistaken and the error becomes obvious when we compare, within the context of Europe, the nineteenth century approach to the restoration of monuments with the current tendency in architectural conservation.

MONUMENTS AS HISTORIC DOCUMENTS

In Europe, as early as 1880, architects developed a suspicion for the abuse of monuments at the hands of the mid-nineteenth century restorers. In fact, the Venice Charter was drafted to replace the nineteenth century approach to architectural restoration with historically accurate principles of conservation. The eminent Italian architect, Camillo Boito, was the first to articulate conservation principles that were in direct opposition to nineteenth century restoration theory, as articulated by Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. In 1880, Boito explained the concept of the monument as follows:

In a democratic society such as ours, the essential monument, the dominant feature, so to speak, of the world of architecture must be the house. The Greeks had their temples

and propylaea; the Romans their amphitheaters and baths; the first Christians their catacombs and basilicas; the knights in armor their cathedrals and city halls, and so forth. We have our dwellings.⁹

Following Boito, G. Giovannoni stated his philosophy of conservation, which later formed the basis for the Venice Charter, as follows: With monuments it is better to consolidate than to repair, better to restore than to embellish... We urge then this architect to consider seriously this axiom, that nothing should be added or taken away from ancient buildings. His basic premise was to minimize new construction and carefully distinguish the new from the old, in order to expand the concept of the monument. He recalled Camillo Sittes idea that if one puts a work of art in a setting different from which it was destined, one diminishes its character.¹⁰

In 1913, Giovannoni published his famous article on *Diradamento*, which meant the thinning out by selective pruning. At an urban level, both these activities were essential to adapt the old city centers to modern life. Therefore, demolition here and there of a house or a group of houses and creating in their stead small piazza with a garden, a small lung in an old quarter... (would add)...a variety of movement, associating effects of contrast with the original setting¹¹ The concept of the *piani regolatori* in Italy was a direct outcome of the philosophy of *Diradamento* according to which the monument was an intrinsic part of those essential conditions of context that constitute its setting. According to Giovannoni, the monument is the entire setting.¹²

This expansion of the concept of the monument was deeply rooted in a view of architecture that illustrated an awareness of the multiplicity of interpretations in any form of representation. Cultural artifacts may embody the "genius of a people" in one form or another. When monuments are seen to represent social attributes and when they are valued as an "important adjunct of history" they begin to play a double and communicative role. As Mitchell points out, representation is always of something or someone, by something or someone, to someone.¹³ Whereas the first two qualifiers of representation need not be a person, we can only represent things to people. This automatically implies a distancing of the monument from the viewer.

The primary concern in performing anastylosis is to retain as much authenticity as possible in the monument. The term authenticity in this context implies the elimination of interpretation by retaining those characteristics of the monument which suggest its age. The appeal for the age of a monument is a search for the neutral ground on which a monument may be evaluated. It is a fairly recent event in the history of the monument and dates back precisely to Alois Riegls essay on *The Cult of the Monument*. Riegl joined the terms age and value in a characteristic turn of the century way to suggest the end of the appeal for ruins and monuments associated with the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to him, if the nineteenth century was the age of historical value, then the twentieth century appears to be that of age value.¹⁴

The earliest admirers of ruins appreciated their emotional and sensory effects on the spectator as well as their ability to embody human intellect. Such a respect for monuments meant a revolution in taste; a liberation from historic and formal restrictions in favor of the imaginative and the picturesque. The nineteenth century approach inherently implied an intellectual

and sensory intimacy between the viewer and the monument. The romantic fascination of the picturesque aspects of ruins was also related to a philosophical reflection about the impermanence of human-made objects and the ultimate triumph of Nature.¹⁵

The aesthetic appeal for an aged surface can take two forms. One is an increase in a rather negative sense. This is the case in which the original appearance of the object might have been so markedly different from our customary perception that it would be almost distasteful to our present taste. Perhaps the most relevant example of this is the facade of the Parthenon which was formerly covered with bright colors. As Berenson has noted: "We have got as much inured to discolored pictures as to colorless sculptures that we almost never see a work in either art that still looks as it did when it was fresh. When by a miracle a painting has retained freshness ... it offends our present taste."¹⁶

Another way in which the aged look of an art object contributes to its aesthetic appeal is the simple accumulation of time. In 1711, Joseph Addison wrote about a dream in which he was viewing a row of great paintings by the masters which were being continuously touched by an old man. He wrote that the old man "busied himself incessantly, and repeated touch after touch without rest or intermission, he wore off insensibly every little disagreeable gloss that hung upon a figure. He also added such a beautiful brown to the shades, and mellowness to the colors, that he made every picture appear more perfect than when it came fresh from the master's pencil."

The old man is Time.¹⁷

MONUMENTS AS WORKS OF ARCHITECTURE

The relationship between the aged surface of a monument and its spectator is a critical dimension of the Venice Charter. Its aim to retain the age value of monuments is advanced at the cost of their original form. The interest in the original condition of a monument is not always guided by aesthetic appeal. The nineteenth century restorer of French medieval architecture, Viollet-le-Duc, was mostly concerned with the monuments unique integrity and meaning as it was accomplished by its creator.

Viollet-le-Duc was one of the most active restorers of his time. The restoration of Saint-Sernin (1845-1879) in Toulouse was one of his earlier restoration commissions but he worked on it through most of his career. Very few monument restoration projects since have been contemplated for so long or have aroused as much controversy. The latest de-restoration of Saint-Sernin (1979-90), proposed by the *architect en chef* for historic monuments, Yves Boiret, has replaced most of the nineteenth century additions (insert Figure 9 here). There were several reasons for the decision of the *Commission des Monuments Historiques* to accept Boiret's proposal, two of which demand attention. The critics of the nineteenth century restoration claim that Viollet-le-Duc altered the form and structure of Saint-Sernin on the basis of contestable archaeological evidence.¹⁸ And, that he based these alterations on principles of stylistic unity which made the building appear complete and new.¹⁹ The commitment to achieve historical correctness has prompted a re-evaluation of Viollet-le-Duc's career as a restorer. It also provides the means to de-restore Saint-Sernin to its pre-1860 state.

During the restoration of Saint-Sernin, Viollet-le-Duc

made three major interventions, for which he is much criticized.²⁰ First, he introduced a long, narrow gable roof over the nave and two lower lean-to roofs over the side aisles. Second, he replaced the *chemin de ronds*, pierced by a row of semi-circular windows just below the cornice, substituting them with clerestory windows which he preferred to call the *oculi*. And last, he demolished the isolated buttress of the seventh chapel but, later that year, reconstructed all the isolated buttresses on the first seven chapels.²¹ These interventions radically elevated the roof level, which gave the building a pronounced silhouette, and introduced direct sunlight into the nave, the chevet, the choir and the transept aisles.

During his restoration, Viollet-le-Duc postulated the independent relation of the ribs to the webs in the vault. In this scheme, the thrusts of all parts had to vary according to the nature of materials and their specific strengths and weights.²² He maintained that the medieval builders introduced the buttresses in the mid twelfth century to ensure safety during structural experimentation. Therefore, the buttresses were not constructed on calculations and, thus, they were secondary to the structure.²³ In his view, the intricate buttresses of the sixteenth century Late Gothic architecture codified design rules and, hence, stifled structural experimentation which he observed at Saint-Sernin and other basilicas of the transitional period, from Romanesque to early Gothic.

In promoting Gothic architecture as the national style Viollet-le-Duc focused on the late Gothic structures because they operated on structural principles that could be interpreted even in new materials. But, in restoring the Late Romanesque cathedrals, he attempted to revive the unfulfilled intentions of the early master masons, rather than their successors. These early builders had not fully understood the principles of rib vaulting, even though they realized that in the rib vault were the possibilities of exact computations. Their structural experimentation was at the price of the additional buttressing.

In Viollet-le-Duc's view, a restorer had to develop principles of restoration according to the unfulfilled intentions of the original builder. To reveal this intention, a restorer had to understand the structural variations that existed in different buildings of that period. In this scheme of thought, restoring a monument meant the continuation of a specific architectural tradition. This kind of restoration required the restorer to recreate the intentions of the original builders, in order to continue their aspirations. For Viollet-le-Duc, restoration was not simply the preservation or conservation of an historic edifice. It was the act of re-establishing in a finished state. It was the realization of the unfulfilled intentions in architecture. A restorer performs a creative act in recovering the origins of the monuments. He does not focus on the appearance of the monument, instead, he attempts to continue the tradition of its original builders.

When a restoration aims to recover the intention of the original builder, it tends to obscure the visual age of the monument. This practice, widely accepted in the nineteenth century restoration practice, placed monuments wholly at the mercy of the restorer as it was the restorer who could conceptualize the original form of the edifice. Based upon a notion of the original and unique integrity of an architectural work, it was the skill, inspiration, and interpretation of the restorer that carried more weight.

In contrast, the Charter's recommendation tends to practically eliminate interpretive transformation to historic edi-

fices. Conservation, according to the Charter, is a means to achieve scientific accuracy in recovering historical facts, as they are manifested in the monument.

CONCLUSION

Many factors contribute to the decisions that result in the restoration or conservation of monuments. Each decision has little effect until a general and agreed concept of the monument emerges. The act of restoring or conserving a monument is a practical expression of the ideas by which it is guided.

To understand the concept of the monument requires the same concentration and intellectual effort that is needed for comprehending a work of art. This does not mean that a monument is necessarily a work of art, it implies that understanding a monument is as complex a phenomena as comprehending any artistic creation.

A monument is a structure or edifice that is intended to commemorate a person, action or event. The original creator's intention may either be deemed unfit or may not remain evident in time. Monuments can compensate for this loss of historical meaning by gaining new and distinct interpretations. As suggested in this paper, the process by which a building gains the status of a monument and by which monuments attain new meanings are deeply rooted in our views on architecture. Therefore, one can argue that architectural theories have practical consequences that go beyond the realm of designing new buildings. They serve as sources to the ideas about architecture and may also influence the treatment of existing buildings by subsequent generations.

This paper concludes that giving old buildings a new lease on life requires, first and foremost, their interpretation. It has challenged a specific conviction in contemporary conservation practice which aims to retain only the material authenticity of monuments at the expense of their formal and aesthetic significance. Conserving architectural works of the past can not merely be a historical concern, neither can it be an aesthetic matter alone; it is the balance of these two approaches that should motivate the principle of architectural conservation.

NOTES

1. The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964), commonly known as the Venice Charter. As cited in Cevat Erder, *Our architectural heritage: from consciousness to conservation*, UNESCO, 1986, p. 221
2. For instance, the eighteenth-century architect Carlo Lodoli's conviction that things that are visible must also be legible in terms of how they are made visible. This aspect of Lodoli's architectural theory is reviewed by A. Memmo in *Elementi dell'Architettura Lodoliana*, Zara, 1833
3. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, London, 1960. Gombrich's book, however, also contains other theories of representation.
4. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, New York, 1968; G. Kepes, *Language of Vision*, Chicago, 1944; Richard Rudner, "On Semiotic Aesthetics," in *Journal of Art and Art Criticism*, volume 10, 1951, pp. 67-77; Kendall Walton, "Are Representations Symbols?" in *The Monist*, volume 58, 1974, pp. 236-54; Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 1977, Academy Editions, London, 1981; Charles Jencks & George Biard, *Meaning in Architecture*, George Braziller, NY, 1969
5. Bernard Fielding, *Conservation of Historic Buildings*, Butterworth, 1982, p. 252
6. The most rigorous criticism of the Venice Charter is advanced by A. G. Krishna Memon, in *Conservation in India. A search for direction, Architecture + Design*, 1989, pp. 22-27; in *On the production of Authenticity in the Restoration and Re-use of Historic Buildings*, unpublished lecture given during a symposium in Katmandu in Nepal, May 1991 & in *Rethinking the Venice Charter: The Indian Experience*, unpublished paper presented in the Third conference of the *International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments*, Paris, October 8-11, 1992
7. ICOMOS 9th General Assembly and International Symposium, Lousanne, Switzerland, October 6-11, 1990. As cited in Wim Denslagen, *Restoration Theories, East and West*, in *Transaction: Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings*, Volume 18, 1993, p. 7
8. Alfred Wyss, as cited in W. Denslagen, *ibid.*, p. 3
9. Camillo Boito, *Architettura del medio evo in Italia con una introduzione sullo stile futuro dell'architettura italiana*, Milan, 1880, pp. viii-ix
10. As cited in M. Piacentini, *Sulla Conservazione della bellezza di Roma e sulla sviluppo della città moderna, Associazione Artistica fra I Cultori di Architettura*, 1916, p. 10
11. G. Giovannoni, *Il diradamento*, 1913. Later published as *Nuovi contributi al sistema del diradamento edilizio*, in *Relazione tecniche al II Congresso Nazionale degli Ingegneri Italiani*, April 8-15, Rome, 1931, p. 75
12. In Giovannoni's own words: *che il monumento sia tutto linsieme*, *ibid.*, p. 57.
13. W.J.T. Mitchell, "Representation," in Lentricchia & McLaughlin (ed.) *Critical Terms for Literary Theory*, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 12
14. Alois Riegl, "The Cult of the Monument: Its Characteristics and Its Origin," Forster & Ghirardo (translation), in *Oppositions*, Number 25, 1975, p. 29
15. Zucker, Paul, *Fascination of Decay*. The Greg Press, New Jersey, 1968, p. 195
16. Berenson Bernard; *Aesthetics and History in Visual Arts*, New York, 1948, p. 57
17. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, Number 83, June 5, 1711, reprinted in *Miscellaneous Works*, III, Oxford, 1830
18. Yves Boiret, *Architect en Chef de Monuments Historiques*, in *ICOMOS Information*, Number 3, July-September, 1990, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Naples, pp. 3-12
19. Yves Boiret, *Saint-Sernin parenthese refermee*, in *Connaissance des Arts*, Number 469, March 1991, pp. 105-112. Also see, *French architecture: The way it was*, in *The Economist*, November 10, 1990
20. Yves Boiret, *Saint-Sernin de Toulouse: Ses metamorphoses*, in *Monuments Historiques*, June 1992, Number 181, pp. 77-84
21. Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Archives of the Ecole des Beaux Arts of Toulouse*, invoice 933.2.83 to 933.2.111. As cited in, Odile Foucaud, *The Restoration of Saint-Sernin de Toulouse from 1860-1862: 29 Newly Discovered Iconographic Documents Signed by Viollet-le-Duc and Esquie*, in *Bulletin Monumental*, Volume 147, Number 4, 1989, pp. 333-344
22. Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire Raisonne de L'Architecture Francaise du XIe au XVIe siecle*, Paris, 1854-1868, Volume I, pp. 45-46, 73-74; Volume IV, pp. 14, 85, 126; Volume IX, p. 501
23. Viollet-le-Duc, *Principles of Western Architecture in the Middle Ages*, in *Discourses on Architecture*, Volume I, B. Bucknall (translation), Grove Press, New York, 1959