
CONSERVATION ETHICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: TOWARDS AN EXTENDED TOOLKIT

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Abstract: In answer to the question raised by the conference, *Are our Conservation-Restoration Theories and Practice ready for the 21st Century?*, this paper advocates an opening to concepts coming from disciplines outside the conservation world, in order to address old and new heritage challenges from a fresh perspective. These concepts are not supposed to replace tools inherited from 20th Century theoreticians, but to unite with them in a broader toolbox dedicated to conservation professionals. Considering recent reconstruction projects as a magnifying mirror of current heritage dilemmas, the paper, using texts written in a totally different context by Anglo-Saxon logicians, concentrates, as an illustration, on the ways in which intentions underpinning a reconstruction can affect the very identity of the object or monument concerned.

Keywords: Identity, authenticity, reconstruction, anthology

1. Introduction

In his now classic essay on the “régimes d’historicité”, the French historian François Hartog (2003) has very well described the effect of globalisation, democratisation and mass consumerism on our relationship with the past and thus, with heritage. In the course of the 1970’s, at a time when the ink of the Venice Charter was barely dry, postmodernity triggered a loss of collective anchoring and memory, paradoxically accompanied by an amplification of the thirst for commemorations, in the name of identity or heritage. Pierre Nora’s great endeavour *Les lieux de mémoire*, fully corresponds to this “presentism” era, including aside from monuments, museum and archives, intellectual constructions such as the Larousse encyclopaedia (Nora, 1989). It very well illustrates the “extension of the heritage domain” as defined by the sociologist Nathalie Heinich (Heinich, 2009). In our “post-monumental” era, anything can possibly become heritage, regardless of scale, of artistic qualities, of age or ontological degree – from tangible to intangible. This is a sign of times. Following the example of Nelson Goodman replacing the essentialist definitions of art with the question

“When is there art?” (Goodman, 1976), we should consider focusing on a dynamic and operational definition of heritage. The question “When is there heritage?” better corresponds to contemporary cultural studies and our attempt to understand “heritagization”; it contains the idea of a performative action, implying new actors, new dynamics, new process, new research questions, new difficulties and new opportunities. Moreover, the gradual globalisation of heritage debates starting with the 1931 Athens Conference and culminating in 1972 with the World Heritage Convention has led the Western World to reconsider its certitudes about sometimes alien traditions and concepts: the Nara Document is the expression of this phenomenon.

The broadening of the object of heritage studies, together with a confrontation with other ways of defining, understanding and living heritage are wonderful opportunities to open one’s mind and avoid taking cultural statements for granted. But we can’t deny that some recent or current projects which wouldn’t have been an option only twenty years ago also question our fundamentals: the actual or dreamed reconstructions of disappeared monuments, such as the Dresden Frauenkirche, the Saviour Church in Moscow, or the Tuileries Castle in Paris, are only a few examples. If one could object that these reconstruction projects are but marginal to conservation, a thematic issue of the French journal *Monumental* on “Completion/Restitution/Reconstruction” has convinced us to consider this increasingly regular phenomenon as a magnifier mirror rather than an exception to more conventional practices. After addressing very diverse reconstruction case studies, ranging from the already mentioned examples to the post-war “restitution” of the Mostar bridge and the “reconstitution” of Mies’ Barcelona Pavilion, the publication ends with a debate led by the architect François Chaslin, addressing the issues of authenticity, true and false, matter, legibility, as well as “social demand”. Beyond the refusal of some of the participants to question the very principle of “restitutions”, limiting the debate around the quality of the results (Bercé, 2010, p.102), the discussion appeared to conflate operations led by very different principles. Is it correct to consider that “when you replace anything in a monument, you make nothing but something new”, and that as a consequence, “the minimalist substitution of a damaged stone by a new one, is thus restitution”? Or can we simply consider that “false is not as good as true, but that doesn’t mean that a copy is worth nothing”? And especially, which place should the “social demand” occupy? Pierre-Antoine Gatier, chief architect of historical monuments, rightly underlines that “globalisation, (...) anxiety, (...) the rise of culture” leads us to “territorial, cultural projects driven by, not to say, some kinds of nationalism, thus identity projects” (Bercé, 2010, pp.101-103). Are these motives sufficient to justify anything and everything?

In 2000, the Riga Charter observed (ICCRUM, e.a. 2005), in the context of the Eastern bloc collapse, that “replication of cultural heritage is in general a misrepresentation of evidence of the past, and that each architectural work should reflect the time of its own creation”, but that “in exceptional circumstances, reconstruction of cultural heritage, lost through disaster, whether of natural or human origin, may be acceptable, when the monument concerned has outstanding artistic, symbolic or environmental (whether urban or rural) significance for regional history and cultures” (art. 5-6). Even if, beyond the need to prove the necessity

of a reconstruction, through a consultation of national and local authorities as well as the affected communities, the document subjects the operation to the existence of a sufficient documentation, preservation of the in situ remains and the absence of falsification of the context, it nevertheless implicitly implies that the “social” demand can be a sufficient condition to justify a reconstruction. It means that the reasons leading to a reconstruction can make it acceptable, when more general conservation principles would reject it, based on the lack of intrinsic values of the reconstructed result. May then the concept of authenticity, defined by the same document as “a measure of the degree to which the attributes of cultural heritage (...) credibly and accurately bear witness to their significance” (art. 4), be obliterated?

We have to admit that during the last decades, the concept of authenticity has been caught in an inflationary economy: in 1992 already, David Lowenthal pointed out what he called the “cult of authenticity”, illustrated by the fact that the words “authentic”, “authenticity” and “authentification” were used five times more than in the seventies (1992, p.184). Despite of this, we believe that this concept remains an important regulating ideal: if we accept a complete relativism, we leave the field free for anything and everything and the confusion encouraged by some media aimed for the general public. As an example, the website of the association promoting the reconstruction of the disappeared royal castle of Saint-Cloud¹, near Paris, uses examples as dissimilar as the post-war reconstructions of Saint-Malo or the Warsaw castle, the duplication of the Lascaux caves, the restoration of Carcassonne, and the reconstitutions of the ship L’Hermione and the city of Colonial Williamsburg to justify their intentions. Mentioning this project, that refutes any political or identity approach, but prides itself on a situation on “the most touristic axis of the planet”, that is, the Paris-Versailles axis, leads us to mention that tourism industry is strangely absent from the issue of *Monumental*. Yet it underpins or at least, picks up many reconstruction projects: heritage world shows less and less strength in its resistance to this disneylandisation process, a trend that leads, slowly but surely, to a loss of substance of heritage, that we have called “heritage in the state of gas”, an allusion to the French philosopher Yves Michaud (Houbart & Dawans, 2012).

Let’s come to the question raised by the conference: *Are our Conservation-Restoration Theories and Practice ready for the 21st Century?* We are far from rejecting theories from the past which provided us with effective and stimulating tools, but facing questions raised by such controversial issues, powerful theories of what we could call the “monumental era” might not always prove sufficient. Of course, concepts elaborated by theoreticians such as Riegl or Brandi remain effective – values, potential oneness, aesthetic and historical cases, ... – but the systems to which they belong seem to more and more fail to address the whole complexity of contemporary heritage issues. This phenomenon is not new: the repeated attempts to get the Venice charter revised from the 1970’s on (Houbart, 2014), and the multiplication of thematic documents and charters adopted in the last decades are the best illustration of this impossibility. But while postmodern thinkers made us suspicious towards large systems, they also made us more modest and above all, more inclined to

¹ <http://www.reconstruisonsaintcloud.fr>.

respect “bricolage”, as a most helpful attitude after a shipwreck. We believe that the current return to a case by case approach – as promoted from the interwar period by theoreticians such as Ambrogio Annoni (1946) – often mostly relying on practical constraints such as reuse and technical performances, combined with the use of decontextualised concepts – separated articles from the Venice Charter, for example – and practices – using the Ise shrine periodical rebuilding to advocate any reconstruction project – doesn’t mean to accept a cynical relativism in answer to the cause of a capital-intensive machine.

Almost twenty years ago already, Françoise Choay (Choay, 2000) had pointed out the necessity to abandon a “rhetoric of authenticity” in favour of a “set of operating concepts”. Reflecting on reconstruction projects, raising questions of identity, has convinced us of the incompleteness of the toolkit we inherited from 20th Century theoreticians. Though still perfectly relevant to address the issues that were already present at the time when they were elaborated, they might prove inappropriate to address new types of heritage, new concerns, new issues such as cultural tourism, inclusive approaches, modern heritage or the digital turn. In this context, we have been drawn to look at texts outside the conservation sphere, starting from ontology of art and analytical philosophy. We discovered that taking a step to the side could provide a stimulating insight on heritage conservation problems. In fact, it is not surprising that, facing what many have called a heritage inflation, some new actors could help us. Now that heritage has quitted the monuments sphere to encompass any material or immaterial reality worthy of conservation and that the expert point of view is challenged by the ones of a broad range of stakeholders, from the user to the investor, it becomes interesting to look at this reality from different points of view borrowed to a wide range of human sciences such as law, communication, aesthetics, semiotics, anthropology or philosophy, to name a few.

Together with our colleague Muriel Verbeeck, we are currently gathering texts in order to propose an anthology that could complement the existing ones in helping to fill conceptual gaps and throw a reinvigorating light on new problems raising old questions. The originality of the project is to address movable and immovable heritage at the same time, and to choose most texts outside the conservation world, with fields such as formal logic, ontology of art (Nelson Goodman) and even, literary theories (Genette) (Houbart & Dawans, 2011-1 et 2011-2). Some of these concepts are already known by a number of conservators – for example, the useful distinction proposed by Nelson Goodman between allography and autography (Goodman, 1976; van de Vall, 2015) –, but some others, much less: among the latter, we will develop, as an example, the impact of intention on identity, based on texts by Anglo-Saxon logicians, and more particularly, Theodore Sclaltsas (1981).

2. Facing the expectations of the heirs

Patrimonial issues considered insoluble, are sometimes simply paradoxes that philosophy has not yet solved after 25 centuries. This is the case of the restoration of the boat of Theseus which, according to Plutarch, already animated the debates on the agora in the 5th

Century BC, and about which logicians and other philosophers of language still argue today. The stakes are essential since it is a question of assessing whether the vague character (the vagueness) of an object is ontological (the vague object would then exist) or more simply reveals human indecision – a problem of imprecision in the relationship between things and words, which could reveal the shortcomings of the formal or transcendental framework that, according to Kant, allows us to shape the data of the experience.

Difficulty exists both for a ship or a cathedral and this raises two fundamental questions: (1) If I gradually replace the material of an object so that it remains functional, to what degree of replacement of the material can I still speak of the "same boat" or the same cathedral? 51 percent? (2) Subsidiary question: if while replacing the boards of the ship of Theseus, an "evil genius" takes the old boards to rebuild the boat to the identical, which of the boats is that of Theseus, the one that has seen its boards replaced in a continuous spatio-temporal logic or the one reconstituted by the set of original boards ?

The very numerous scientific articles that attempt to bring a solution to the puzzle clearly fall outside the scope of our competencies and even of our purpose. But it is nevertheless very interesting to note that the logicians cannot avoid, in their logico-mathematical reasoning, to take into account psychological elements, even if it is with regret, and to try to exceed them. David Wiggins, for example (Wiggins, 2001, p.101) faces the difficulty by questioning the expectations of the one who commands (or not) the restoration of the object whether or not it is of a heritage nature. From the sacred boat he moves to the example of a watch:

When someone gives his watch to the watchmaker to clear and repair, the thing he wants back may, on a very sober and literal minded construal, be either that very watch (by the unproblematic criterion) or else a watch with a certain obvious relation to his (a watch of the same kind, in better working order, enjoying considerable community of parts, etc.). If he wants more than that, if he thinks his watch as an antiquarian or historical relic from a better age or as a work from the hand of a great artist, then he should take more precautions than we normally do take. He should care about its original constitution. The truth is though that, for some practical purposes, we simply do not mind very much about the difference between artefact survival and artefact replacement. (A negligence that in no way undermines the real distinction between these.)

And that leads him to grant what Kant calls sensitive mobiles, in other words different interests or expectations that anthropologically disturb the reasoning of the logician: "The antiquarian who favours the reconstituted ship has a different interest, it might be said, from the priest who favours the continuously repaired ship. Both are stuck with the identification ship but, having different interests, they do not mean quite the same thing by "ship"" (Wiggins, 2001, p. 94).

This clashes the logician's understanding and Ferret (1996, pp.109-110) does not want to be satisfied with a psychologising demonstration, so, referring also to Wiggins, he states that "(...) if we simply want to say that the boat of Theseus does not know that it is the boat of Theseus and that ultimately it is up to us – priests, archaeologists, navigators, philosophers,

etc. – to decide”, that does not mean that a strictly logical answer is not possible. If the French logician is right, it must nevertheless be admitted that the solution is delayed, what forces us to use, as Descartes would have said, a “provisional morality” in terms of heritage. What we can learn from this debate, which takes place in a disciplinary field quite foreign to ours, is that in the field of culture or heritage, it is up to humans to decide, depending on their expectations. And we find again this idea dear to Riegl that we cannot privilege all the values at the same time, those of the priests and those of the antique dealers, in particular. In terms of identity and authenticity, it is up to us to define from which point of view we restore the object. Let’s imagine a grandson who inherits a knife from his grandfather. He can consider himself in possession of the knife of his ancestor, even if the latter had replaced the blade and the father of the boy, the handle – a strange logic that should please the philosopher Lichtenberg.

Anyway, these arguments of logicians draw our attention to phenomena that cannot leave the architect indifferent. This is so in the way we collectively interpret the world: in the face of undecidable “we make the decision”, as Ferret says, from expectations or interests. The same is true of the fine distinction we make between what we call a forgery and what we call a copy. The first is not in our eyes assimilable to the second for the sole reason that his intention is unhealthy, since it is to deceive us – one of the conditions thus defined under the pen of one of the French analytic philosophers: “someone must try to pass off as an X what is not an X” (Darsel, 2007, p. 191). In the field of heritage conservation, Ségolène Bergeon-Langle and Georges Brunel confirm that a forgery is an “object or document intentionally produced to deceive on its origin the one to whom it is presented” while the copy designates more generally “an object produced in imitation of a another by the action of an individual”. In other words, “an object is not “wrong” as such, but in relation to the intention behind its manufacture or presentation” (Bergeon & Brunel, 2014, pp. 117, 183). Copies and counterfeits may, if viewed without interest, be formally or qualitatively identical and therefore interchangeable in a museum that would assume reproduction for pedagogical reasons.

That these human interferences disturb the logicians should not worry the curator, because for him, inheritance issues are primarily psychological and he must simply assume them. What about reconstructed buildings? Can the intentions that led to their reconstruction be taken into account in the criticism of authenticity? By suggesting a positive answer, Theodore Scaltsas' text probably only makes the debate even more complex. It does, however, have the merit of highlighting the fact that any architectural act, and therefore, of restoration or reconstruction, is moved by an intention that gives meaning to the subject, imprints itself in the heart of its identity, and conditions its future.

3. Reconstruction and intentions

Published in 1981 in *Philosophy*, journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy in London, the paper *Identity, Origin and Spatio-temporal Continuity* is a goldmine for philosophical

reflections on heritage. Questioning the necessary character of spatio-temporal continuity for the identity of an object, Scaltsas addresses the importance of the object's history and its "recoverability" after destruction. On the basis of the examples of a broken, then recovered vase and of a prefabricated house, dismantled and re-erected, he sets the condition, in order for two objects to be considered two phases of a same reality, that whether their form, or their fragments (the acceptable size of these depending on the techniques available at the moment and within the culture in question) remain spatio-temporally continuous during the period starting from the creation of the object until the recovery and including the destruction phase. Without going into details, let's mention that this idea helps us to make a useful distinction between operations such as anastylosis (continuity of fragments) or progressive replacements of the matter (continuity of form) and many reconstructions called "identical" that don't meet any of these conditions.

After addressing the ways in which an object temporarily ceasing to be could, under certain conditions, keep its identity, Scaltsas questions the essential character of the object's origin. The fact that the vase or the prefabricated house could keep their identity through time despite a phase of non-existence followed by a recovery proves the non-essential character of their origin: whereas the original vase had been created in the potter's workshop, it is restored by another technician, and a similar reasoning can be applied to the prefabricated house. In order to turn down the opposite argument, according to which the origin would remain the same in all cases – the initial creation – and the successive restoration would be a simple "coming to be", Scaltsas uses the example of a boy who, after building a pile of cubes in the corner of his room, would decide to keep it. Doing this, he opens an original perspective on architectural reconstruction.

In a first scenario, the boy, accidentally destroying the pile two years after its erection, rebuilt it. In this case, there is no doubt for Scaltsas that the new pile is numerically identical to the first one, despite a different origin. In order to underline that the two piles have indeed, in this case, different origin, he claims that even if it was the mother of the boy, and not the boy himself, who had by accident destroyed, then identically rebuilt, the pile, in her kid's room, it would still be considered the same pile, already existing for two years at this place – despite a different origin. By contrast – and this is very interesting for us – if the young brother of the child, jealous of his brother's pile, would destroy and identically rebuilt it at the same place, the two piles, still having two different origins, would in this case be two different objects, despite their identical materiality (Scaltsas, 1981, p. 399).

What makes the difference in considering the piles the same or not is not whether the structure of the second pile is an original conception or not, but whether it is intended to be the same pile or not. In the case of the accidental destruction of the pile the reconstruction was intended to produce the first pile, while in the case of the younger brother's destruction of the pile the reconstruction was intended to produce a new pile. The importance of the intention of the reconstruction can be so significant that if the mother of the older child destroyed the initial pile in order to recreate it in the summer house in the corner of the child's room – so that the child would not

miss his pile – the pile would be considered to be the same, despite the change of location – a significant factor in the determination of the identity of the pile in its own two year history. So, having a different origin does not imply that two objects cannot be numerically identical (i.e. be phases of the same object); but the intention of reconstruction can make all the difference in determining whether the new object is numerically identical to the old one or not.

If we come back to the thematic issue of *Monumental* we already mentioned, it is clear that in many cases, political intentions have led the choice to reconstruct. In Warsaw “very deep motivations, linked to the very identity of the Polish people and its search for historical continuity, have prevailed over one of the major criteria used by conservation doctrine, the respect of historical authenticity”. In Mostar, “the high symbolic value that the bridge represents for the people” justifies the choice of an identical reconstruction (Bercé, 2010, pp. 44, 46). In Moscow, “sanctuaries embodying the expression of history as well as the Russian <soul>” are evoked, a clear political choice “in order to underline the rejection of the Soviet regime and the return to ideological values of pre-revolutionary Russia” (Bercé, 2010, pp. 88, 91). In Germany, the Frauenkirche and the Hohenzollern castle aim both at “promoting the image the German society has of itself”. Finally, if in Paris, there is no doubt that “the partisans of the reconstruction of the palace of the Tuileries are moved – a hundred and forty years later – by a desire of Napoleonic repentance against the Communards of 1871”, we learn that even in Barcelona – where the reconstruction of the Miesian manifesto could have appeared as the simple will to make accessible to the architects one of their favourite references –, the first democratic government in Barcelona to emerge from the Franco regime would have bet on the operation to give back to the city a part of the cultural prestige of the interwar period, when it was “at the forefront of world architecture” (Bercé, 2010, p. 76). Do these intentions, different from those that led to the first creation of these buildings, affect the identity of these buildings? Apart from any technical considerations related to drawing or materials, can we speak of “identical reconstruction”? Scaltsas's text suggests a negative answer, and we would tend to follow him.

It seems easy, of course, to oppose the argument that once (re)constructed, a monument escapes the intentions that led to its (re)construction; that these intentions would not be inscribed, contrary to what we suggested above, at the heart of its substance. We can admit that this is the case of buildings immediately rebuilt after a destruction caused by natural or accidental factors, such as an earthquake (Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, L'Aquila) or a fire (La Fenice, Windsor Palace), and where the reconstruction has no other intention than to repair the loss and allow the building to live on. On the other hand, reconstructions such as those we mentioned, driven by essentially political intentions, seem to us to be transforming the very nature of the monument, from the status of object with an artistic and / or historical value – Régis Debray's “monument as a trace” and / or “monument as a form” – to that of intentional monument – a “monument as a message”. It must no longer be looked at in the “once upon a time” mode but in the “remember” mode (Debray, 1999, p. 32).

Architecture is obviously much more complex than a simple pile of cubes, and any

reconstruction of a missing monument requires choices, indissociable from the underlying intentions. In Barcelona, for example, architects limited themselves to “reconstructing appearances without worrying about constructive archaeology”. In Moscow, a precise state of each monument was chosen, “which was not necessarily that of the monument at the time of its destruction but (...) the most rewarding period for the building” and in the same way, in Berlin, as denounced by Godehard Janzig, only the baroque extensions of the castle are being rebuilt in order to “highlight the reign of the prince elector Frederick of Brandenburg (...) as well as the beginning of the kingdom of Prussia” and this to the detriment of older authentic remains (Bercé, 2010, pp. 79, 88, 95). How to consider the future of these reconstructed buildings? Will it be possible to transform, reuse, restore them in another way than in an “identical” way? In *The Modern Cult of Monuments*, Alois Riegl emphasizes that the “Intentional commemorative value simply makes claim to immortality, to an eternal present and un ceasing state of becoming” (Riegl, 1984 [1903]). In our opinion, by freezing the reconstructed building at the stage of its second origin, political intention makes it become, forever, another object.

4. A new anthology for the 21st century

Anthologies remain valuable training tools: according to Philippe Panerai (Panerai, 2017, p. 50), the one Françoise Choay devoted in the 1960s to the theories of urban planning, *L'urbanisme, utopies et réalités* (Choay, 1965), has even profoundly revolutionised the teaching of architecture in France during the last fifty years. It would be very pretentious for us to claim to provide the heritage curators of the 21st Century with such an important reference work, and what we are trying to do in a collective way is indubitably much more modest. But after what we have described above as a shipwreck by metaphor, we can't avoid thinking that we will all have to roll up our sleeves to tinker with the legacy of great thinkers of the discipline, from Viollet-le-Duc to Riegl and Brandi, but also find other links, other boards, other materials, in other words, other concepts borrowed from all kinds of disciplines if we want the new construction to hold in the storm that the contemporary world and globalised capitalism are blowing on our common home. We have just shown how reading logicians could feed our thinking about identity. In a few days, one of our students will present a master thesis devoted to the architect Charles Vandenhove, in which he addresses the rhetoric of the column from the angle of the literary theories of the French poetics expert Gérard Genette. In the same way that we are convinced that this approach allows him to better detect the subtle tones of this postmodern architecture, we also believe in the enlightening character of a cross-fertilization of theories in the conservation field. That is why we invite all readers of this paper to participate and communicate to us any new reference susceptible to renew our point of view in the field of heritage.

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