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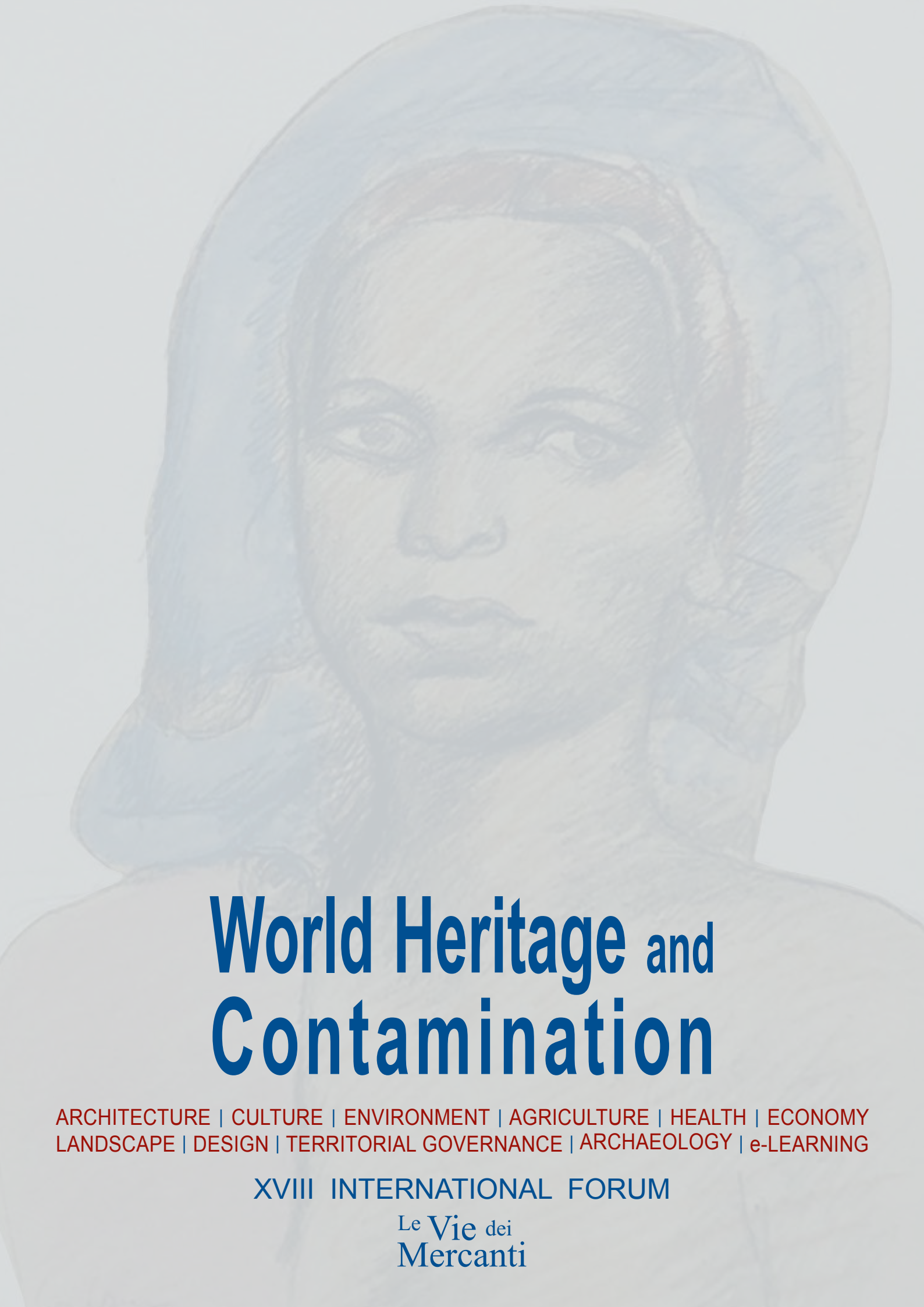
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Restoration and Ruins. Achievements and theoretical issues

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Abstract

The culture of restoration seems to have no spokesperson today. Supporters of reconstructions in the logic of the monument aim to widen the participation of increasingly large sections of citizens to heritage themes. However, this attempt is serving the connivance with strong economic and political interests, which exploit cultural heritage for other purposes, not easily relatable to conservative needs. Analogously, the tendency of absolute respect for authenticity has opened to the issue of planned conservation, claiming a role in the decision-making processes leading the territory.

This contribution does not provide definitive solutions, but it tries to offer a perspective on the diverse cultural landscape of today, through a set of cases. All the different approaches examined coexist within a path that is as present as it is uncertain.

The different experiences involve the quality of the 'substance' that has come down to us: often such a residual and fragmented matter as to question the very possibility and usefulness of being preserved. However, while it is true that the absence of certainty is a fact, it is also true that the debate on how the present and its heritage relate is constantly renewed through the interpretation of different skills.

Keywords: ruins, theoretical issues, ancient/new, restoration

1. Architectures and pre-existences: some theoretical reflections

The theme of the contemporary use of the historical-architectural heritage currently receives considerable attention at least from a quantitative point of view, especially in relation to changing social and economic needs. Even remaining in a conservative perspective, this means that the architectural artefact is subject to continuous and legitimate structural, distributive or performance adaptations in its organicity.

In most cases, the main interest derives from the need to find a new use, which is frequently materialized by adopting a new architectural language. Therefore, transformation is often felt to be an obligatory step that would otherwise lead to obsolescence and destruction of the building itself.

The reuse of the historical built heritage is thus part of the great theme of modern design in historical areas. Once the conditionings of a conservative nature have been overcome, it is not possible to deny the legitimacy of further contemporary insertions, in compliance with the vocations of use of the pre-existing building. In this sense, contemporary forms of expression should be finalized at the needs required by pre-existence, both for the reintegration of lacunae and for a better understanding of the document, as well as for new uses.

As it emerges from all the Restoration Charters, a correct use of a historical artefact can only promote its good conservation. In view of that, it should be noted that the intended use is often considered a purpose of the restoration work. It becomes a design starting point to adjust the existing building. This is legitimate for non-conservative restoration works on unhistorical buildings, where it is also possible to wait for transformations that are aware of the chosen use. But it is not equally legitimate for restoration works on buildings of cultural interest, regardless of the presence of acts of protection. Actually, as in the case of basic historical building, there is a large part of the widespread construction that represents both a material and immaterial legacy of extraordinary relevance, thanks to its material, constructive, distributive, and figurative aspects. The discrimination is that it is not the

building that bends to the new needs of use, but just the opposite: it is the new uses that must be in line with the compatibility of the single or aggregate building. A specialistic historical building could apparently be compatible with the insertion of a museum, thanks to the rooms suitable to host collective spaces; but the presence of damaged and antique wooden ceilings would involve huge reinforcement works for accidental loads, totally neglecting material and structural compatibility. On the other hand, if the same building were to be transformed into residences by dividing it into many units and making it lose its overall organicity, the distributive compatibility would not be sufficiently appreciated. In other words, to propose a new use related to a building heritage of cultural interest, a critical-evaluative recognition based on the vocation of use is fundamental.

Instead, the tendency to recover abandoned architectures through the addition of new functions and significant typological alterations, up to the uncontrolled indifference towards the pre-existing typology, is very frequent especially in European countries where the new uses appear increasingly distant at conceptual and operational level from architectural conservation activities. Thus, profoundly transformative criteria on any pre-existence are indiscriminately accepted. Therefore, if it is clear that restoration work also produces material-figurative transformations, the difference must be in the methodological approach that tends to combine the demands of the artefact and its new use in a conservative context, although it is applied with different results.

Far from any historical-ideological conditioning, the starting point lies in a rigorous philological study that requires an initial suspension of judgment aimed to verify the actual nature of the transformation and stratification processes of the architectural document. On this philological and critical evaluation depend the subsequent operational choices, such as the restoration to ruins condition, the partial or total reintegration of the organism, the use of contemporary language to fill the lacunae [1].

The respect for the authenticity of the material remains a fundamental requirement of the restoration work, even if it is necessary to highlight that the material is not the original one, being the result of the transformative process gathered from all the interventions suffered over time. This implies neither the passive acceptance of any stratification nor the emphasis on the decline process. The latter is a widely tested method in modern Italian architecture, which seems to refer to an "spectacularization of ruins" that recalls not really to the understanding of the architectural document transformation as its uninhibited ostentation. It is an artifact use of the signs of time, of lacerations, of material discontinuities, far from an interest in didactic reconstructions or in the resolution of the document [2].

In many cases there is a real manipulation of the document with the forced creation of wall and decorative palimpsests, almost in search of an aesthetic emphasis of the result conditioned by contemporary taste [3]. Therefore, it is not a matter of choices based on rigorous philological criteria, but it is an attitude referring to the designer's sensitivity towards pre-existence (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Complex museum of Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, Italy. Project by Guido Canali and Mimma Caldarola (1998-2000). Interior with the new museum inside the ancient palimpsest (ph. Mimma Caldarola).

Thus, this approach refers to positions in the history of pre-modern restoration. We might consider the new meaning of the fragment that marks the baroque season in the sculptural sphere, where headless or useless statues are totally reintegrated leading to completely new works.

A different attitude towards the pre-existence comes from those who believe in the continuity between ancient context and modern integration. It refers to a restoration work based on the typological analysis of the document to define a methodological approach suitable for the individual case and resulting from the indications given by the artifact undergoing intervention. Searching for continuity between new functions and pre-existence, the tendency to respect the typological and structural identity of the building can be found in the project for the reuse of a historic *wälderhaus* - a house in the woods - in a museum dedicated to the Swiss painter Angelika Kaufmann (Chur 1741 - Rome 1807), a specialist in portraiture and historical subjects [4]. The museum is situated in the Austrian region of Vorarlberg, near the small alpine village of Schwarzenberg, not far from Bregenz, where the artist spent some years of her childhood and left some important works. The distinctiveness of the project is underlined by the design choices of the new coverings, the reception furniture and all the exhibition spaces which are marked by the use of pinewood in a lighter shade than the original one, darkened by time. The same conservative principle marks the consolidation of the original roofing system in wooden trusses, which is reinforced by new steel beams, as evidence of the added material. The desire to link the old agricultural structure with the new use is solved through a new spatial arrangement: both side walls of the exhibition environment are divided into three shallow niches and are separated from the central room by thin glazed spaces from which the new steel structures emerge. The artist's works are located on white and weakly lit walls, within the exhibition space, where tradition and innovation coexist in a harmonious balance. Without any contradiction, the reuse project combines the painter's works with the traditional construction (Fig. 2-3).

The prevailing attitude that seems to define the actions on the pre-existing heritage in contemporary design culture probably lies in the gap between the cognitive phase and the creative act. This is evident in various works carried out through the filling of lacunae with modern materials and technologies, which deny the context and overlap it to make pre-existence available to new needs. In these cases, the attempt to consider the contemporary project as the last of a series of layers composing the history of the building arises. This orientation includes the selection of the layers on the ancient building, to insert highly recognizable integrations or innovative spatial elements, demolishing portions less significant. We might consider the facade of the Citadel of Corte, which was deconstructed to host a new steel and glass body redrawing the original shape. The attitude is even more interesting because it comes from Andrea Bruno, a designer respectful of the stratifications in all their complexity. It is probably just a theoretical respect for the pre-existing since the intervention by



Fig. 2-3: Angelika Kauffmann Museum, Schwarzenberg, Bregenz, Swiss. Project by Dietrich/Untrifaller Architekten (2006-2007). Views of full-height foyer (ph. Dietrich/Untrifaller Architekten).

subtraction remains frequent, as in the vertical cut on the medieval wall overlapping the remains of the Roman theatre in Tarragona (1987-1994) or the addition of the new building in Lichtenberg Castle (1997) [5]. Therefore, the attention shifts from the pre-existence to the new architecture that is inserted or overlaid on it, by substantially rewriting the document to put it back into the city's life cycle. This attitude is often associated with a strong self-referential character of modern design, which exacerbates the problems of dialogue with the ancient context. The dialectic between past and present is reduced to an ambiguous relationship, in which pre-existence is used and often deeply altered only to convey the new project within an ancient context.

Different is the attitude towards ruin, to which contemporary designers attribute great semantic value, as a resource to imagine new configurations. Along these lines, Gonalo Byrne, together with the Barbas Lopes Arquitectos studio, perceives in the Thalia Theatre ruins a virtuality to enhance that derives from the indications given by the building itself [6]. Against an impossible restoration of the original situation – because it was completely damaged by a fire in 1862, with the exception of the fragment of the portico, later subjected to careful philological restoration - the new project restores the spatiality of the pre-existing building without any pretence, with a minimalist contemporary language. The idea of maintaining the existing masonry as a disposable formwork allowed the creation of a new concrete and terracotta shell, deliberately devoid of architectural detail and treated to attenuate the formwork signs. Inside the monolithic body, the scene and the parterre masonries, which were previously separated by their different use and then reduced to ruins, have been combined in an original unity and continuity, both spatial and material.

A series of design choices concurred to the result. The demolition of some modest buildings annexed to the theatre allowed the creation of a new glass and steel structure surrounding the site and the building itself, first towards the street and then towards the inner garden, delimiting a small square at the back of the theatre. Outside, smoked glass establishes new dialectical relationships with nearby peripheral area thanks to its transparency; inside, gilded glass, stainless steel pillars and polished aluminium ceiling extend the space of the multi-purpose structure, which can be used both for conferences and seminars and for receptions, concerts and theatrical performances.

Starting from the methodological approach to the pre-existence, a wider case study than the above will be exposed, to better understand the problems related to the ancient-new relationship.

2. Some case studies on ancient-new relationship

The conservation of the abandoned historical heritage is, today, much discussed issue in the field of restoration: each action requires a specific approach, supported by the knowledge of the building, from its historical and construction phases to the state of its materials and its most significant aspects.



Fig. 4-5: Kolumba Museum, Cologne, Germany. Project by Peter Zumthor (2009-2015). Views of the new facing in custom made light brick (ph. Rasmus Hjortshøj).

The project of Peter Zumthor for the ruins of the late-Gothic church in Cologne, Germany, a particularly dense space that symbolized the almost complete destruction of the city during the Second World War, is a remarkable example from a conservative point of view. Through a coherent and philological work aimed at rediscovering the time of history, the architect permanently exhibits the ruins of archaeological memory by transferring the sum of the fragments into a single building: thus, the new museum of the Archdiocese, the Kolumba Museum (2009-2015), becomes part of an architectural *continuum* extending on the antique object and preserving its essence. The new building hosts also the chapels of the “Sacramento” and the “Madonna delle Macerie”, built on the site in 1949 by architect Gottfried Böhm in memory of the massive bombardment (Fig. 4-5).

Although it has a very articulated layout to meet the needs of the museum's functional programme - as exhibition spaces, a library, an access area to the archaeological site, prayer spaces and an open-air garden of contemplation - the new building is very clean in its volumes and seem to deny the relationship with the surroundings. Great attention is paid to the control of modern language, materials, and colours. Guided by the historical palimpsest, Zumthor makes an intelligent paraphrase of the architectural panels and continues the planimetric profile of the original church with a new facing in custom made light brick - called “Kolumba Stein” and suitable for fitting into medieval walls. In this way, he declines again the principle of stratification. The solid wall design becomes lighter when the texture of elements becomes more sparser, until it becomes a diaphragm that can be crossed by light. The archaeological space is marked by thin steel pillars wrapped in concrete; together with the masonry, these latter support the spaces built above, where the museum galleries are located [8]. In this sense, the relationship between the figure of archaeologist and architect finds new stimuli in the approach to ruin, tending towards a moment of confrontation that finally reconciles them.

From a methodological point of view, the search for a continuous dialogue between pre-existing and new architecture coincides with the tendency to respect the typology and structural identity of the building.

This is what happens in the Poble Vell of Corbera d'Ebre, in Tarragona, a territory seriously devastated by the Spanish Civil War, of which the Church of San Pedro becomes a tangible evidence. The project (1999-2011) was carried out by architect Ferran Vizoso on commission of the government and some cultural associations with a clear conservative attitude, aimed at reconsidering the relationship with the existing. The value of those ruins, sedimented in the collective memory to become a Monument of Peace - as well as an icon of this place, declared of national interest since 1992 - is exalted thanks to a careful design intentionality able to preserve the pre-existence and restore formal completeness to the whole architectural work, even if the reconstruction follows the direction of the unfinished (Fig. 6-7).



Fig. 6-7: Church of san Pedro, Corbera d'Ebre, Tarragona, Spain. Project by Ferran Vizoso (1999-2011). Views of the large skylight in transparent and light panels (ph. Jose Hevia).

The consolidation of the masonry of the large baroque building, dating back to the end of the 18th century and built on a Romanesque pre-existence, is followed by the conversion of the old religious space into a new multifunctional space. The lack of the roof, the continuous exposure to atmospheric agents and the progressive decline of the material, evoke the image of an archaeological site. In this case, the restoration work is developed as a real protection project through the installation of a light and transparent roof that replaces the existing architecture and makes the finished work a museum of itself, while establishing a tangible link between past and present. The large skylight consists of thin metal arches supporting ETFE panels, known for their durability, thermal efficiency, light properties, low maintenance, weather resistance and sustainability: the interior is sealed, improving living comfort and evoking the atmosphere of the site. The closed windows with transparent panels, the new flooring and the cleaned interior walls have restored the old building and given the community a new space to host exhibitions, concerts, and other cultural functions [9]. Therefore, the ruins are preserved without substantially change of appearance and interferences with the delicate balance between nature and construction, exterior and interior.

However, it happens often that the new intended use for the abandoned historic buildings is guided by design suggestions for the space reinvention and reorganization, as well as by a new architectural language, not always able to face the pre-existing structure. This approach is interesting in the Church of San Francisco: the space reuse is directed towards a function incompatible with the religious one and towards significant typological changes extraneous to the pre-existence. It seems to be a pretext to adapt the monument to modern design intentions, completely transforming the surviving architectural elements, such as the aisle and the façade (Fig. 8-9).

Located in the Catalan city of Santpedor in Spain, the Church of Sant Francesc was part of a convent complex built in the early 18th century and demolished in 2000, after a long process of decay. As a result, the church was transformed into an independent building. The long work of consolidation and restoration (2003-2011) led by the architect David Closes is mainly focused on the conversion of the old religious structure into an auditorium and multi-purpose cultural container, followed by the design of a historical archive for the upper floors of the chapels in the south side of the church. The added elements are clearly distinguished from the original ones using a contemporary language, inspired by the principle of distinctiveness and made of modern constructive systems and materials. In addition, rather than rebuild a uniform roof, it is decided to create a series of skylights projected into the lacunae vaults of the aisle and the chapels, strategically unresolved to ensure the passage of natural light in the interior space, which was originally rather dark. The choice to not erase the damage and the decline suffered by the building is considerable. But behind the desire to preserve the building's historical integrity by keeping intact the space and the formal quality of the aisle, there is an



Fig. 8-9: Church of Sant Francesc in Santpedor, Spain. Project by David Closes (2003-2011). Views of the stairs rising-up the external façade wall and marking the interior space (ph. Jordi Surroca).

opportunity to do something completely different than restoration: the church is not rebuilt but acts as a frame to the real project that is shown in all its compositional strength. The glass bodies which are partly placed outside the building and intended to accommodate new needs, such as vertical accesses and toilets, denounce the contemporary language; the set of ramps and stairs, rising up the stone walls of the church and marking the interior, define a circular path around the complex [10]. The resulting historical space is certainly renewed, but probably no longer recognizable in its identity. For the coastal towers, a separate investigation can be done since they are punctual elements in which it is not always possible to insert an intended use different from the original one. If the enjoyment of the good and its return to community represent some of the issues which contribute to the preservation of the good itself, in the Pi des Català tower the target is achieved with truly excellent results. The tower is one of the four defensive structures marked by a circular plan and conical shape dating back to the 16th and 18th centuries on the island of Formentera in Spain. It has been the subject of an interesting restoration work (2009-2015), also approved internationally with the special mention of the European Award for Architectural Heritage Intervention for its precision, simplicity and effectiveness in preserving the building as an essential element of great patrimonial value (Fig. 10-11). The work of the architect Marià Castelló Martínez is orderly and selective: the ancient-new agreement emerges thanks to the delicate inclusion of technological and material solutions that completely respect the original structure. In fact, the intervention involves only those parts affecting the integrity and the global identity of the building by making a few targeted and specific adaptations, mostly for presentation and urban accessibility. Thus, this structure is not only safer but also the only one usable on the entire Mediterranean island. It is accessed through an aperture made during the 20th century in the eastern part of the ground floor. A thin corten steel staircase, supported by ropes from above, leads to the first floor where the entrance originally was, located in a position raised from the ground for defensive purposes and protected by a machicolation. A restored spiral staircase leads to the outer part of the tower, where traces of the garret to defend the access is still visible. The masonry consolidation work involved the addition, or replacement where necessary, of limestone elements that are closely related to their original counterparts. Thanks to their work, they reveal the chronological differences between the original substrate and the process of intervention. As the staircase, the portals and windows frames, the elements that were not present at the time of construction were placed in dry and made in contrast through the use of corten steel in shaped panels as a sign of the clearly contemporary character of the work [11]. Instead, in several cases the creative act prevails over the cognitive phase, giving rise to controversial results since they are clearly aggressive and devoid of sensitivity towards the preservation of the historical artifact.



Fig.10-11: Pi des Català tower in Formentera, Spain. Project by Marià Castelló Martínez (2009-2015). View of the entrance and detail of the steel staircase (ph. Marià Castelló).

The tendency to modify the ancient context is very frequent. For example, the projects for the tower of the castle of Matrera in Spain and the tower of Vilharigues in Portugal are among the most intrusive experiences: the vast lacunae in the walls were the object of important design actions, having being filled with new glass facades or new bodies in reinforced concrete, steel and corten.

Therefore, to achieve a good restoration does not mean to apply only protection and conservative prescriptions on the historical-architectural heritage, but above all it means to work with a sensitive approach towards pre-existence, to try to achieve that balance still too precarious between history and modernity. In some cases, the approach to the theme is guided by the exaltation of pre-existence. Thus, the reintegration of the image does not produce the desired effects of figurative coherence, but it is rather a disturbing element. The results achieved underestimate the concept of global that should guide the project decisions, keeping alive the architectural heritage and making adaptations that do not disrupt the original spirit.

The medieval castle of Matrera in Villamartín, in the Spanish province of Cadiz, is recognized as a national monument in 1949 and an asset of cultural interest in 1985. The north tower called Pajarete tower is the last trace of its enclosure. In 2013 it was partially destroyed due to structural problems and neglect, causing the lack of stability and the collapse of the three floors, the vaults, the entire north wall, and part of the west wall. The event fed the constant accusations against an increasingly disinterested population in the cultural heritage of the province and encouraged the Regional Government of Andalucía to start a conservation work in 2015.

To recover the potential unity of the ruin in its original form and dimensions, the architect Carlos Quevedo Rojas of Carquero Arquitectura designed a rather compact and single-coloured block in support of the ancient structure and covered with the same white lime mortar used for the castle. Through the anastylosis of the materials *in situ* and the distinctiveness of the work, the architect takes to limit the prescriptions of Historical Heritage Law 13/2007, which prohibits mimetic reconstructions and requires the use of materials that are different from the originals [12]. His intention moved by the desire to make the buildings recognizable as a *monumentum* in its physical, historical, and aesthetic consistency to be left to future generations. Although the purpose was to make the tower usable again, also considering the lack of easy access due to the steep terrain, the intrusiveness of this project also caused an intense debate also from a landscape point of view, since the element represented a historical landmark, closely linked to the regional culture. Nevertheless, the restoration work received the International Architizer A+ Awards 2016 in the "Preservation" category. However, the large white volume, that emerges too much in relation to the ancient Moorish walls, and which had previously received only sporadic visits, is now considered one of the most tourist attractions of the area.

The ancient-new agreement is an oppressive overlay in the recovery project for the defensive system ruins of Vouzela County, in Portugal. The surviving fortified Vilharigues tower was built at the end of the 13th century, richly decorated with battlements, arrows and barbicans, with a square plan on three levels, recognisable by the marks left by the beams supporting the attics. Of the ancient granite structure only two walls remain, declared property of public interest in 1944. Architect Renato Rebelo's project takes shape in 2013 with the creation of a new steel and glass structure inside the monument, similar in size to the original and divided into three floors for museum, exhibition, and multimedia areas [13]. So, the ancient fragment becomes a clear pretext for doing something else.

The outlined scenario clearly shows how far the positions and the designers are from those of the specialist restoration. Once again, the restoration and conservation demands are subject to the forced need to re-function the ruin in view of collective use.

3. Conclusions

Through the examination of some case studies, the contribution has tried to define the theoretical foundations and method guidelines that support the intervention of reuse of the built heritage, combining the demands placed by the building and its new intended use. The attempt is to emancipate the adaptive intervention from the syntactic and semantic themes of the compositional sphere, focusing instead on the critical nature of the intervention itself.

The issue of the lacunae treatment represents a fundamental moment of architectural restoration through a critical approach, and it is engaged into these choices. There is no wish to condemn the restructuring. There are some very good examples, which are fully legitimate since they involved a building heritage in need of a generic and non-conservative type of recovery. In the light of contemporary sensibility, the indiscriminate adoption of the same deeply transformative criteria on any pre-existence is not conceivable. Obviously, restoration also produces inevitable material-figurative transformations; however, they always remain confined to a conservative environment. In other words, the task of resolving the text is given to the restoration, while the task of transforming the text is given to the restructuring (Fig.12-13-14-15).

The question is: could a recovery be conscious of pre-existence through a compatible use and performance upgrade? This shifts the attention towards pre-existence and makes the disciplinary field of restoration extremely central.

As Paul Philippot said, restoration is “critique in progress”, i.e. restoration is such only in its concrete realization, which otherwise remains a theoretical exercise [07]. “It is at this precise (...) operational moment that it will be legitimate to use contemporary language capable of (...) proposing again the value of the building masses (...).

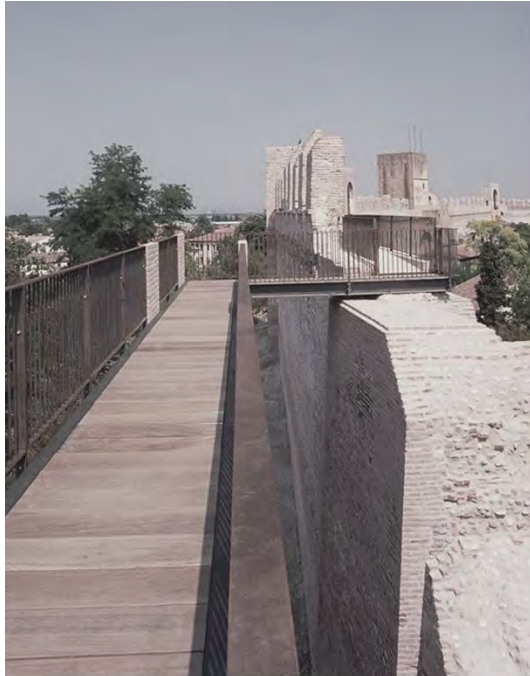


Fig. 11-12: Cittadella Walls, Padua, Italy. Project by Patrizia Valle (1994-2013). Reconstructed patrol walkway Porta Padova. The restoration focused primarily on maintaining the city walls, using materials and building techniques compatible with traditional ones (ph. Andrea Pizzato).

Fig. 13-14: On the left, Paleochristian Basilica of San Pietro, Ortigia, Siracusa, Italy. Project by Emanuele Fidone (2006-08). Interior with the new wood dropped ceiling (ph. Lamberto Rubino). On the right, Cathedral of Norwich, Norfolk, United Kingdom. Project by Hopkins Architects Ltd. Detail of the brise-soleil and ancient masonry (ph. Hopkins Architects Ltd).

A consonant, non-quotations or allusive language that knows how to be (...) architecture for pre-existences", which thus find their actualisation and their vital insertion in the contemporary world, and not to be architecture on pre-existences, as in the past [02].

The methodological approaches tested in the field of restoration make it possible to draw on an almost infinite range of valid solutions available to the designer. The central point of the question remains the process of knowledge of the pre-existing work, analysed in its specificities and internal articulations.

In this perspective the restoration is intended as a specialist discipline: it reads the work in its complexity, with a global vision of the document, aiming for a resolution where there are still unresolvable gaps, without resorting to neutral or fashionable solutions. The problem is not the use of contemporary language, materialized by iron or glass, not even the appreciation of ruin, which seems to characterize most of today's interventions, flaunting lacerations and failures.

The resolution of the document can only occur through the wise use of a contemporary language, without pretence, and capable of reconnecting the parts of a building, without prevarication or self-referencing. Not an "architecture over pre-existences" but an "architecture for pre-existences" [02].

*Clara Verazzo is the author of paragraphs 1 and 3, Mariangela Bitondi is the author of paragraph 2.

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