

THIRTY YEARS OF PRACTICE ON MODERN ARCHITECTURE: THE STANDPOINT OF THE ITALIAN CULTURE OF RESTORATION

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Abstract: the praxis established on Twentieth Century Architecture in the last thirty years has drifted away from traditional restoration principles showing how conservation problems of these artifacts tend to be solved with banal reconstructions. New shapes and innovative materials have suggested that principles and methodology of its restoration should also be such, so that the reconstruction of these buildings has been preferred to regain their original image rather than to conserve them materially and preserve their historic and architectural values. This widespread attitude is unrelated to the critical and scientific groundwork that characterizes European conservation approaches, especially the Italian one, and rare but significant 'true' restoration works disprove the common places that generate the drift to reconstruction.

Key Words: Modern Architecture. Architectural Conservation. Restoration. Rehabilitation.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND RESTORATION

As the physical decline of many important buildings of the Twentieth Century started becoming evident at the beginning of the Eighties, a new precinct of architectural restoration seemed to arise and needed to be explored. The work on this 'substantially' new heritage, very different from the ancient one, apparently posed practical problems which could not be solved within the traditional restoration praxis: these buildings appeared to be condemned to disappear because they were defective and improperly built, and destined to perish because fragile and vulnerable¹.

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1 SALVO, S., *Restaurare il Novecento. Storia, esperienze e prospettive in architettura*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2016.

These premises seemed sufficient to justify a sudden shift from theory and methodology of traditional conservation which, misunderstood as a mere practice, did not seem to offer decisive solutions. Rather, the alleged impossibility to materially conserve modern artifacts became a pretext to justify the claim for ad hoc methodological, theoretical and practical tools and to start a new praxis centered on the obsolete idea by which it is more convenient to save the image of a work rather than its material consistency. Working on modern architecture with such principles gave birth to a new kind of reconstruction intended as a draw to the 'original splendor', not as a process of revelation/conservation/transmission of past values that have survived through time.

Consequently to such headway to the field, the restoration of twentieth century architecture turned retrospective and technicist, moreover lead by the North European cultural context which is dissimilar from the Mediterranean one where restoration theories develop since more than two centuries². The input to extract this matter from its theoretical context came, not incidentally, from designers, historians and technologists, which retain Modernity as the top of their genealogy and, therefore, recognize themselves in it without any historical mediation. By doing so, they assume a perspective opposite to that of traditional restoration which is founded on the awareness of the historical and critical gap between past and present. Brought out of the conservation field and defined as unfamiliar to the culture of restoration, practice on modern buildings reached a general regression. Intended as an easily enjoyable and consumable type of reconstruction, it found foothold in the current cultural sensibility, and reflects its constant aspiration to accept reality through its representation.

It should however be reminded that the access of modern architecture into the riverbed of conservation has not marked a "copernican revolution" in the theory and in the principles of traditional restoration while it has, instead, filtered further confusion about basic assumptions of conservation. Yet, the practice on a specific sector of architectural works had never before assumed such a self-determined profile³. Set out in an atmosphere of emergency, after thirty years of practice the matter seems to have lost its initial pathos, stifled also by the hypertrophic growth of attention that it has attracted. The early exigency evoked by the "icons" of Modernism, some of which have already undergone various reconstructions (such as the villa Savoye and the villa Tugendhat subject to several interventions), has then gradually moved on to levels of higher dimensional and conceptual degree, such

2 This matter arises around the mid Sixties in historiographical terms but a specific practice on modern buildings dates back to the founding of Docomomo, *International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement*, born in 1998 in the Netherlands on behalf of a group of architects and technologists of the Delft University of Technology and specifically dedicated to buildings of the Modern Movement.

3 VARAGNOLI, C., "Un restauro a parte", in *Palladio*, 1998, 22, pp. 111-115.

as the preservation of public residential housing with a historical status which is awaking serious problems in many European countries. Having lost the contextual reference points, these have further worsened the confusion in this field emphasizing the a-going drift.

The now vast experience in the field and a number of case-studies allow to define the general framework of this matter and highlight the difference between prevalent pragmatic needs and true cultural motivations that affect the process of evaluation, comprehension and recognition of the modern heritage. The former give reason of the origin and development of the current approach which has brought to a number of reconstructions, while the latter to very few works distinguished by a critical approach, which however prove the vitality of the Italian restoration approach.

OUT OF RESTORATION, INTO RECONSTRUCTION

The vast but rambling literature in the field —which itself tells the lack of coherence of the matter— indicates that in most cases the practice on modern buildings does not consist in material conservation but in partial or total reconstruction and follows different intentions and attitudes. Reproduction *à l'identique* takes place if the building is considered an icon; reconstruction is preferred when an experimental building that has failed technically and technologically must be improved; replacements and changes occur if the building does not satisfy today's practical requirements and regulations, while renovations and thorough changes are given for practical reasons. Conservation takes place only rarely, and with a tendency to fetishism, to satisfy individual contingencies or extra-cultural instances. Anyhow, each of these operations looks back to the original conditions of the building, trying to catch an idealized image and paying no attention to its hic et nunc and to its aged and weathered condition. This transition to a new form of idolatry that pursues an ideally authentic image (which is actually undefined), triggers a vicious conceptual spiral spoiled by many common places, easy syllogisms and various biases.

“Icons” —such as the villa Savoye, the Zonnestraal sanatorium, the Viipuri Library, the Einsteinurm, the Bauhaus, the houses of the Weissenhof and many other— are brought back (and kept) in a condition of eternal youth, with all the consequences and the sacrifice of authentic material substance that replacing, reproducing and reconstructing implies. Never mind if the patina of time is erased because the age of the work is short; you may as well believe you can reproduce today, exactly and without mistakes, what has been built just a few years ago; you may think you can build *as* before and *better than* before in spite of an ever improving technological progress; you may legitimize any replacement on behalf

of principles of seriality, transitoriness, and fragility of modernity (which instead are programmatic assumptions rarely put into practice). The intent is clearly to re-possess and re-affirm the symbolic value of certain buildings that are appreciated for their ideal character rather than for their effective built truth.

The intentions that move these works are, therefore, not at all exquisitely cultural, neither is the process of their value assessment centered on historical and artistic values. The desire to regain a lost image and to perpetuate it, depends on contingent matter, on the need to declare today's individual and collective values, mostly for pragmatic and opportunistic reasons. Actually, there is no difference if it comes to ancient heritage but the circumstance becomes extreme in relation to recent buildings, probably also due to the active role that modern architecture holds in everyday life.

We are, therefore, very far from Renato Bonelli's definition of restoration as «an activity where today's culture is fully implemented»⁴. Buildings of the past are instead considered mere icons and, if not demolished, they play as background of contemporary architecture and must pander contemporary ambitions, related to aesthetics and taste but in no way addressed the safeguard and revelation of the values of the past.

The process that has brought to the conservation of the metal and glass facades of the Pirelli building in Milan has instead been a very different one. Although it hasn't solved a very difficult technical conservation issue once for ever, this work stands out for its critical and scientific premises and for the positive cultural consequences it has triggered and that still persist after ten years⁵. In principle, the work has been displayed as a «critical hypothesis in act»⁶, and has tackled a critical process based on the study and knowledge of the building, rather than on technical and practical measures, offering open and dialectic solutions. The issue, in this case, did not consist in solving a sheer technical problem but, first of all, in acquiring a scientific and detailed knowledge of the building, surveying and analyzing directly its components. The results of the investigation process and the acknowledgement of the exceptional material and technological value of the curtain wall —and of its tiniest construction details— have become the keystone of the entire operation, producing a critical and scientific consequence on the decision making process that has oriented technical, economical and political choices.

4 BONELLI, R., «Restauro Architettonico», in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, vol. XI, col. 322 and following, ms coll. 344-351, Venezia-Roma 1963.

5 SALVO, S., «Grattacielo Pirelli. Cronaca di un restauro», in *Saggi in onore di Gaetano Miarelli Mariani*, Quaderni dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura, Bonsignori, Roma 2007, pp. 571-580.

6 PHILIPPOT, P., «Restauro filosofia, criteri, linee guida», in *Saggi sul restauro e dintorni. Antologia*, Bonsignori, Roma 1998, p. 47 (original ed. *Historic Preservation: Philosophy, Criteria, Guidelines*, 1976).

Apart from the Pirelli case, unfortunately an exceptional and isolated experience, today the field is characterized by a monotonous and banal approach, based on the attempt to re-found the theory in search of practical solutions and of decisive recipes, which try to simplify what cannot be simplified.

Bringing the matter back to its hermeneutic level, the attention moves onto the analysis of the process of memory transmission and draws to the background the material features of the artifact. Not the object—in our case modern buildings—is the cause of the so-called cultural overturn, but the conditions affecting its reception; not the physical and formal character of modern architecture, but the motivations on which the acknowledgement of its value is founded. The origin of the drift to reconstruction may, then, be tracked back to the expression of the critical judgment intended as a preliminary act to restoration. Referred to recent buildings it becomes a hasty step, clinging onto unstable historical references and weakened by a bare recognition of its memory value, often assessed ‘in absence’ of the building. Therefore, the peculiarity of this field depends on the lack of an adequate chronological distance and of a consolidated historiography. In this sense, the retrospective attitude should be interpreted as an idle projection on the past of our civilization which, for many reasons, aims at regaining symbols of the recent past but denies the incidence of the short though dense lapse of time occurred between creation and present reception.

As a matter of fact, it is well known that the inclination to conserve the witnesses of the past is not modeled around the objects, which may differ greatly in terms of materials and form, but is shaped on the critical judgment given in a precise historical moment and in a specific cultural context. Monuments—noticed Riegl and others⁷—are not such due to their essential features but to the culture of a time. They, and their restoration, are then the expression and consequence of a value assessment which is entrusted into individual and collective awareness and mirrors its epoch. Values and disvalues today are acknowledged to modern architecture and are therefore a reflex of our times and represent its individualism and complementary conformism. In this sense, the many different approaches to recent heritage give back the several different ways with which the memory of the past—remote or recent—is perceived and explains how and why today's society has strayed away from the desire to respect and conserve it.

Which are the true motivations that drive works on modern buildings?

Leaving aside those cases where the work moves directly from the intrinsic features of the artifact (such as its material substance, its form, its experimental character,...), the reasons depend mainly on the boundary conditions within

7 Similarly, Theodor W. Adorno wrote: “The true relation with a work of art does not consist in the fact that, as said, it is adapted to a new situation, but instead that in the work itself one may find what historically generates a different reaction” (translated by the a.); these words also recall those of Marcel Duchamp “*c'est le regardant qui fait le monument*”.

which the observer operates. These seem mostly oriented by practical and economical evaluations, or by the cultural relations that bind the observer to the work of art (including if the author is directly involved in the conservation of its own work) and by the symbolic, political and ideological role that the building holds in today's perception. Eventually, motivations may also rely on affective, relational and personal reasons and depend upon the private sphere of the actor. Standing beyond the objectivity of the artifact and accessing to a field of complicated and inscrutable relations—very personal, often unspoken and, therefore, strange to the historical context—any evaluation becomes uncertain and the scientific and methodological approach is therefore debased. Neither may we speak of a philological approach, as any premise to this very fine science is missing. These conditions lead away from the European cultural context and further away from the Italian critical approach to restoration.

ITALIAN RESTORATION AND GLOBAL CONSERVATION

The situation gives back a clear image of what cultural heritage means to contemporary civilization which considers monuments primarily as tools to address messages and significances and to trigger economical mechanisms. In the context of an increasing globalization of cultures that clashes different ways of intending memory, each according to their cultural origin, the recent architectural heritage represents a fertile ground to ratify, deplore, modify, debase, transform or exploit values and meanings of the past and the role of its conservation. Wider ranged evaluations in each specific field will tell us if such drawback from a material conservation of memory foreshadows the breakdown of a specific Western cultural practice⁸ such as that of assimilating the experience of past⁸ and the betrayal of the basic role of history⁹. In this regard Giovanni Carbonara's words are clear:

A prima vista sembra che l'interesse per la conservazione e il restauro si sia, in questi ultimi tempi, rafforzato, ma non è chiaro se la prospettiva sia quella

8 This is what post-modern philosophy would polemically tend to assert, in relation to the crisis into which art, history and cultural values have fallen today. Also Jean Baudrillard notes a sort of "self-defense" of our society which, incapable of generating a new history, seems to be destined to brood over the history of the past to prove its own existence.

9 In this regard Giovanni Carbonara's words are clear: "A prima vista sembra che l'interesse per la conservazione e il restauro si sia, in questi ultimi tempi, rafforzato, ma non è chiaro se la prospettiva... sia quella del conseguimento di un livello di attenzione e di conseguente accuratezza operativa maggiore oppure se stia profilandosi il rischio di un capovolgimento totale e di un radicale cambiamento di orientamenti. In fin dei conti è ben fondato il timore che il restauro sia l'espressione residua di una cultura borghese, d'impronta propriamente otto-novecentesca, a rischio d'estinzione... Non è da escludersi che, di qui a qualche anno, della conservazione e, più in generale del passato non interessi più niente a nessuno. Un processo di radicale mercificazione sembra appiattire tutto il presente", CARBONARA, G., "Le tendenze attuali del restauro in architettura", in *Critica, estetica, metodologia e conservazione. Nuove conoscenze e prospettive nel mondo dell'arte*, Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte, II supplemento, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 2000, p. 539.

del conseguimento di un livello di attenzione e di conseguente accuratezza operativa maggiore oppure se stia profilandosi il rischio di un capovolgimento totale e di un radicale cambiamento di orientamenti. In fin dei conti è ben fondato il timore che il restauro sia l'espressione residua di una cultura borghese, d'impronta propriamente otto-novecentesca, a rischio d'estinzione. Non è da escludersi che, di qui a qualche anno, della conservazione e, più in generale del passato non interessi più niente a nessuno. Un processo di radicale mercificazione sembra appiattire tutto il presente¹⁰.

In this context the conservation of modern architecture becomes a sensible seismograph of the transformations that are running over the Italian and European culture, tracing the dynamics and the geopolitical balances that involve the entire world. These processes highlight a very diversified geography of cultures where some apply a strong influence on others prying on easily manageable values at global scale. Therefore, the idea that «today the cultural heritage does not stand for itself, it must be built it is not an essential feature descending from the research of a transcendental principle, but a “socially built” phenomenon, beyond myths and into effective facts» seems to prevail, while the issue if it should «at first always pose a conservation problem or if it may, or must, be given as an economical or a social resource»¹¹, appears an implicit sign of the difficulties that variety, complexity and entity of the built heritage opposes to its conservation, and depicts the conflict that lays behind its consideration as an economical and social resource and, at the same time, as a cultural heritage. So, we are again beyond the field of restoration (and far away from the intention, or the need, to consider a witness of the past for its value of memory) and into the identity of our civilization, into its social, anthropological, economical and pragmatic values where the sense of conservation itself is put into discussion, not only the specific issues that concern the restoration of modern architecture.

Therefore, today's misunderstanding of the aims and intentions of conservation gives scarce evidence of the critical and scientific doctrine developed in Europe and in Italy since the Eighteenth century. A first discard has been marked by the hushing of the International Charter for Restoration, drafted in Venice in 1964, today criticized for an excess of “eurocentrism” by a scientific community inclined to merge Eastern and Western cultures. However, none of the many problems raised against the Venice Charter has been solved, not even by the Burra Charter, laid out

10 CARBONARA, G., “Le tendenze attuali del restauro in architettura”, in *Critica, estetica, metodologia e conservazione. Nuove conoscenze e prospettive nel mondo dell'arte, Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, II supplemento, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 2000, p. 539.

11 REICHLIN, B., “Riflessioni sulla conservazione del patrimonio architettonico del XX secolo”, in REICHLIN, B., PEDRETTI, B., (ED.), *Ritorno del patrimonio architettonico*, “Quaderni dell'Accademia di Architettura. di Mendrisio-Università della Svizzera Italiana”, Silvana Editoriale-Mendrisio Academy Press, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2011, p. 13.

by the Australian Icomos committee in 1979. It's many further versions¹² aiming to propose universal conservation principles and methods valid for every artistic and historical expression, instead highlight how cultural choices are today defined by economical political and financial matter¹³.

In the international context, the preservation of modern architecture holds undoubtedly a crucial role, due to the transnational and over-continental extension of the recent built heritage and due to the broadcasting of a Western-like conservation practice. The commitment of transnational organisms—in primis of Unesco through Iccrom and Icomos—in favor of an international care for its preservation must be considered a merit but, also, the account of a responsibility. As a matter of fact, conservation principles are here confused with a sort of political-cultural strategy which aspires to resolve world-scaled conflicts by teaching cultural heritage conservation as a means to establish a dialogue among the people. This strategy obliges to a “politically correct” attitude, and is weakened by the need to lean on unquestionable scientific data rather than on critical interpretations, which would risk to step down to the level of a cultural comparison when involving historical and aesthetic interpretations. Conservation has, therefore, become a peace-keeping strategy which relies on the mutual acknowledgement of the cultural identity of the people considered as premise to a peaceful acceptance of their geo-political identity, outlining an unexpected manipulation of the architectural heritage, with all the consequences that this implies.

In addition, monuments don't always obtain advantages from being nominated “World Heritage” as supreme acknowledgement of their cultural importance due to the excessive attention that sometimes they end up drawing. In fact, it may occur that such sites are subject to massive touristic haunting or are rebuilt to regain their “original splendor” to support political balances, or—being very significant objects—are even targeted as military goals¹⁴.

12 “Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance. It includes maintenance and may, according to circumstances, include preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation and will commonly be a combination of more than one of these”, *Australian Icomos Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance 1999 (The Burra Charter)*, 1979, revised in 1981, 1988, 1992 and in 1999, in MARQUIS KYLE, P., WALKER, M. (ed), *The Illustrated Burra Charter: good practice for heritage places*, Australia Icomos, Burwood-Australia, 2004.

13 VARAGNOLI, C., “Metamorfosi degli dei, metamorfosi del restauro”, in CARBONARA, G., DALLA COSTA, M. (ed), *Memoria e restauro dell'architettura. Saggi in onore di Salvatore Boscarino*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2005, pp. 291-300.

14 An updated description of modern buildings included in the World Heritage list may be found online <http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-38-2.pdf>; on selection criteria, see IDENTIFICATION and Documentation of Modern Heritage, “World Heritage Papers”, 2002, 5. Although the highest percentage of the world built stock dates back to the last century, less than 3% of the sites listed belong to the 1900 (only 34 sites over 962 in 2013).

The ambition to build a global platform for the conservation of the past has caused inevitable conflicts and has brought to political acrobatics and to many contradictions, for example around the different ideas of authenticity developed by each culture¹⁵. The attempt to disseminate a global culture of conservation has also been followed by a distortion of the conservation language which, earlier developed around Latin rooted words containing their origin and meaning today applies to English expressions, easily comprehensible everywhere in the world, in the Western as well as in Eastern countries. But, as in the case of the word “monument”, words are dense of meanings. So, the expression “restoration of monuments” is now outmoded also in Italy, whereas *tutela del patrimonio culturale*, that recalls the American “preservation of the cultural heritage”, is preferred. The influence of English pragmatism in this practice is also evident in the adoption of restoration methodology, especially at the investigation stage whose importance is acknowledged and shared by many scientific communities involved in the field of preservation. This “cognitive step” is often misunderstood as a mere documentation and recording activity, which only considers scientific aspects connected to quantitative and instrumental information. These are considered more reliable and “certain” than a critical reading of the artifact so that also restoration work inevitably comes to be a scientifically, predetermined—and therefore indisputable—operation.

Well-aligned with these assumptions, Docomomo—today’s unquestioned referent for any initiative in the conservation of modern architecture—has expanded its scopes beyond the Modern Movement, also behind request of Icomos. The cooperation among international institutions involved in the preservation of the recent heritage aiming at a dialogue among over-governmental institutions, is very beneficial in itself as it engages various cultural instances, but obtains the counter effect of bowing the theory to the “lowest cultural common denominator” flattening out the scopes of conservation to a culturally uncharacterized niveau¹⁶.

More recent and prestigious initiatives supporting the preservation of modern architecture, as the program CMAI, Conserving Modern Architecture Initiative, run by the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles, are structured similarly and pursue the aim of establishing the catchment of an international thought, concentrated on some specific research themes, concerning the story of the buildings, the

15 LARSEN, K. E., JOKILEHTO, J., LEMAIRE, R., MASUDA, K., MARSYEIN, N., STOVEL, H., (ed.), “Nara Conference on Authenticity in relation to the World Heritage”, conference proceedings, Nara (Japan) November 1-6 1994, Unesco, Iccrom, Icomos, Tokio 1995.

16 Icomos has recently established *ISC20C-International Scientific Committee on Twentieth-Century Heritage* dedicated to modern architecture preservation issues, gathering other institutions such as Docomomo, the International Union of Architects-UAI and TICCIH-*International Committee for the conservation of Industrial Heritage*; see <http://icomos-isc20c.org/>. The ISC20C Committee, founded in 2008, has met in Sidney (2009), Dublin (2010) and Madrid (2011); conference proceedings are published online.

study of building materials and the technical aspects of their conservation. Here the central and dominating position of the North American culture is explicit, and sometimes declared¹⁷.

A different and more interesting appeal emerges from other scientific and cultural research programs on European ground, especially in the Italian and French speaking Swiss regions. Among the most relevant, the project for a Critical Encyclopedia for the Restoration and Reuse of Twentieth Century Architecture which aims at gathering ideas on the future of twentieth century architectural heritage rooted in the European culture¹⁸. Well built—and very well financed—this research project gathers the free contribution of an international and multi-disciplinary scientific community and is now producing some interesting result. Yet, there is no trace of a direct and outspoken reference to the historical and cultural European heritage from which these ideas draw their strength, although they belong to a precise genealogy, and are rooted in the Italian restoration theory. This is barely and inappropriately mentioned as the “Italian way to restoration”, an expression that keeps sought distance from a tradition which, instead, is a precious resource. In the context of the many efforts in favor of the safeguard of Modernity, Italian restoration culture could instead be considered itself worthy of preservation, «a cultural heritage —wrote Paul Philippot— not simply a theory!».

CLOSING UP TO REOPEN THE DISCOURSE

Although Modernity has produced a deep fracture into tradition, in the field of architecture and elsewhere, it has also stated a new awareness of the importance of the past and of the conservation of its material evidence. Modernity has therefore been built upon a double groundwork with “complimentary” aspects, sides of the same coin, which are only apparently facing opposite directions. The conflict recognized between the two is based on misleading syllogisms which hide a lack of critical sense and of cultural courage.

17 http://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/field_projects/cmair/. The initiative has been opened by a preparatory meeting; see MACDONALD, S., OSTERGREN, G., (ed.), *Developing an Historic Thematic Framework to Assess the Significance of Twentieth-Century Cultural Heritage: An Initiative of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth-Century Heritage*, May 10-11 2011, GCI-ICOMOS, The Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 2011 published online.

18 This research project, coordinated by Bruno Reichlin (Architecture Academy in Mendrisio, USD), Franz Graf (EPFL-Lausanne Polytechnic) and Vittorio Magnano Lampugnani (ETHZ-Zurich Polytechnic) and funded by the Swiss University Conference (CUS) in cooperation with SUPSI in Lugano and the ‘Fondazione Archivio del Moderno’ in Mendrisio, has started in 2008; eight international conferences upon modern architecture conservation practices have been organized until today, and several seminars on topics and works of specific relevance; all conference proceedings have been published; on this initiative, see REICHLIN B., PEDRETTI, B., (ED.), *Riuso del patrimonio architettonico*, *op. cit.*

It may be true that the attitude to produce culture by acknowledging the value of the past is a prerogative—and a privilege—of Western bourgeoisie, but the access of modern heritage into the riverbed of preservation has marked the decline of a critical and truly conservative way of working. Conservation has then collided with a world that is adjusted on pragmatic and opportunistic policies that avoid the effort of a critical interpretation and the difficulties of a very complicated heritage.

The restoration of modern architecture is, therefore, still an open matter, which waits to be explored in a new and different way, perhaps retracing the path opened by a 'critical' thinking. New terms could be considered the founding of a new approach, perhaps facing its historical-critical issues and rediscovering the origins of restoration in the Eighteenth century. Consequently, modern architectural historiography could be reviewed in the light of a direct re-discovery of the built heritage.

There is another chapter that should be rewritten concerning the vulnerability and fragility of modern artifacts due, as said, to its materials and construction techniques. Experience teaches that, aside to some truly experimental building which were built to last one season, there are many other that show a strong resistance against aging and decay, comparable to that of traditional buildings. In addition, the extreme exposition to use and the lack of maintenance should also be weighed when evaluating deterioration processes that affect the built heritage of the past century. And, by doing so, the central role of criticism in restoration would be again asserted.

The terms on which the value assessment is based today should also be re-considered, examining various issues such as: the effectiveness of adopting a historical and aesthetic polarity in defining the critical judgment of a modern work, as in the case of traditional or ancient ones; the definition of the chronological threshold between history and chronicle that states the admission of very recent artifacts in the riverbed of conservation; the re-interpretation of the principles that have set the appreciation of Antiquity since the Age of Enlightenment as the “poetics of the fragment”, the concept of ruin and the notion of historical patina; the definition of the limit within which decay and weathering are figuratively tolerable within modern architecture; the acknowledgement of a formative role to function in modern architecture. And then, switching to operational matter, how to restrain the role played by contemporary authors in the restoration of their own works; how to adjust the relation between old and new in a figurative context where old is very similar to new; how to process the conservation of materials condemned to last very shortly, as in the case of plastics; how to prevent or cure the effects of aging and decay in the case of materials with sensible surfaces, as with fair face concrete, and much more.

Countries bound by a common Latin and Mediterranean culture —such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Latin American— are tasked to continue working around shared ideas, concepts and principles, although standing on the margins of a globalized world. In this context, Italian literature of the field gathers a strong and rich tradition, which may still be inspiring to solve “new” problems. Much has been already analyzed, discussed, and improved by authors as Camillo Boito, Gustavo Giovannoni, Cesare Brandi, Roberto Pane, Giulio De Angelis d'Ossat, Renato Bonelli, and recently Giovanni Carbonara. Still, the “use” of this heritage is restricted to the few Italian speaking readers; but this is another question, or perhaps it isn't.