

Concerning Restoration Approaches in Italy at the Turn of the 20-21 Centuries

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ABSTRACT

In the article we discussed the approaches to restoration, which are most widely used in the restoration practice in Italy. A comparative analysis of the creative concepts of the authors – theorists and practitioners of the profession – was carried out regarding restoration additions, the relationship of restoration, conservation and reconstructive actions on the heritage site, general provisions of the restoration theory. The recognized leader of the Italian restoration school is Giovanni Carbonara, a proponent of the “critical-conservative” approach. Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, an architect-practitioner, offers a “clean conservation” approach, contrasting the “old” and “new” in architecture. Architect Paolo Marconi develops a pragmatic line of “repair and maintenance” approach. Despite the significant differences in theoretical concepts, they are very noticeably softened in restoration practice. And architects with diametrically opposed views often join forces to work on a common project.

Keywords: theory of restoration, architecture, Italy, conservation, restoration, valorization

I. INTRODUCTION

The interest in the views on the theory of restoration in Italy at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries is mainly due to two reasons: the first is that the theory of restoration of Italy, as a country with a rich cultural heritage and experience in its restoration, is extremely interesting in itself; the second reason is that it is the period since the late 1990s that has been analytically least developed. In Italy, there is no generalizing analytical work for this period, since the segment under consideration is the time of the living leaders of the profession who find it difficult to generalize their own practice and the practices of colleagues.

Restoration thought in Italy, as well as protection legislation [1], developed throughout the 20th century: at that time various approaches to restoration activities within the country were developed, international documents were adopted that changed the common European attitude to heritage, and the post-war years became the period of the formation of the main Italian restoration centers-schools that exist to this day. The views of specialists who by the end of the 20th century became the most significant and influential figures on the field of the modern theory of architectural

restoration in Italy were formed in the 1970-1980s in line with these schools, under the influence of the restoration theory founders (C. Brandi, P. Gazzola, R. Pane, R. Bonelli, G. De Angelis D'Ossat, P. Sanpaolezi, F. Minissi).

Without diminishing the merits and without detracting from the significant contribution to the development of restoration thought by D. Fiorani, B.P. Thorsello, A. Bellini, S. Cassiello, P. Fanchelli, G. SpanziChimbolli, I would like to dwell on the restoration concepts of G. Carbonara, M. Dezzi Bardeschi and P. Marconi, which were most widely used in restoration practice in Italy.

II. CRITICAL-CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

The general line of the classical approach to the restoration of architecture in Italy is drawn by Giovanni Carbonara (born 1942), the recognized head of the Roman school of restoration, who is a follower of the theory of the artistic image potential unity developed by Cesare Brandi. Brandi advocated the preservation of all walks of life of the monument, for the reversibility and distinctiveness of restoration additions. The most difficult to understand part of his approach is the “potential unity” of the image of the monument, not always physical, which should be the unity of the whole, and not the unity of the sum [2]. One of the first major works of Carbonara was the book “Restoring the

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Image” (La reintegrazione dell’immagine) of 1976, in which the ideas of his teacher and predecessor were considered, rethought and developed. First of all, these are the provisions on:

- unity of the restoration methods and principles of both movable objects of art and architecture with many different applied techniques;
- dual nature of works of art having historical and aesthetic values [3].

In general, G. Carbonara continues the traditions of philological restoration, a set of measures aimed at returning the monument to its original essence, aimed at studying, interpreting the monument, where the recognition of additions and the scientific justification of restoration actions are taken as the basis, but calls his approach to restoration “critical-conservative”. He calls his method “conservative” because of the primary requirement to transfer the monument to the future in the best possible condition, and also due to the expansion, in comparison with the past, of the range of objects and concepts that are recognized as worthy of preservation; and “critical” - due to the fact that the restoration intervention represents an independent unique episode in the object’s history, which does not fit into the predefined categories and is not subject to the established rules, and therefore requires new research every next time, and then work without relying on preconceived provisions and dogmas [4].

Carbonara believes that restoration cannot follow strict and unchanging rules or laws that were set once but should be based on doubts turning into a subsequent study. What the author means by working without reliance on biased provisions becomes clear from the definition that he gives the restoration. More precisely, during his scientific career Carbonara gives two definitions of restoration. The first of them, earlier (refers to 1976), is rather a general declaration than a strict definition: “[Restoration is] an act of culture and at the same time highly specialized. The restoration looks to the future and not to the past, nor is it reserved for the enjoyment of a select few ancient. It has educational and memory functions, for future generations, for young people; after all, it is not about the pleasure of studying in itself but the training of every citizen and his quality of life, understood in the most spiritual and material sense” [3].

Such a general definition of the restoration of G. Carbonara somewhat changes in 1987 [5], finding the final wording, which he will follow subsequently: “Restoration means any intervention aimed at preserving and transmitting to the future, facilitating reading and without erasing the traces of the passage over time, works of historical, artistic and environmental interest; it is based on respect for the ancient substance and the authentic documentation

constituted by these works, also proposing itself as an act of critical non-verbal interpretation but expressed in concrete operation. More precisely, as a critical hypothesis and always modifiable proposition, without the original being irreversibly altered” [4]. In 12 years the definition of restoration has undergone significant changes, from an abstract philosophical characterization become to a concrete and understandable guide to action. From this brief and succinct definition, several conclusions follow (confirmed by other publications of the theorist):

- an architectural monument, like any other work of art, has a historical and artistic value,
- first of all, it is necessary to preserve the matter of which the monument consists,
- however, during restoration, the monument may be changed in order to “facilitate its reading”,
- restoration intervention should be reversible.

However, this definition does not reflect one of the main features of the maestro’s approach - the desire for a dialogue of the “old” and “new” necessary for restoration, since for Carbonara restoration is not limited to conservation but is a complex activity that includes new additions, which help to reveal the hidden meanings of the monument [6]. Carbonara denies the possibility of “neutral” restoration intervention, saying that it is impossible to integrate completely new elements into the monument without adding “creativity”, because there is no neutrality, any change always tends to create new visual connections with the environment. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly consolidate the autonomy of a new restoration intervention, recognizable and, of course, reversible, an intervention that can and should be realized through the only language that we are allowed to - the language of our time, we must abandon mimicry and adaptability - but within a safe critical framework [3].

G. Carbonara believes that the difficulties of the discipline are associated with the methodological problem of restoration of monuments, that is, with the translation of theoretical provisions into the criteria and guidelines of a particular architectural work, as well as with the solution of individual conceptual issues, the discussion of significant interventions, and the interpretation of model restorations.

According to Carbonara, the fundamental problem of restoration, its main difficulty is to reconcile historical and aesthetic requirements in the process of restoration intervention, and this is a problem that is never solved once and for all but solved again in each case. The professor believes that most architectural restorations are unsatisfactory, not only from a “scientific point of view”, but also from a visual one, from the point of view of creating an image, on the one

hand due to simplification and fantastic atrophy, and on the other hand due to an excess of uncontrolled and random creativity. He writes about the need to take into account the importance of figurative components along with the observance of historical requirements, whether it is a physical restoration or only allegorical [4].

III. PURE CONSERVATION

If the principles of Carbonara determine the central line for the development of restoration in Italy, the "left" course is determined by the concept of Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, a supporter of the addition of new matter to extend the life of the monument.

Marco Dezzi Bardeschi (born 1934) is an architect representing the Florentine restoration school, whose formation of professional views was influenced by his teachers G. Mikelucci, an architect who designed in the style of rationalism and P. Sanpaolezi, holding the position of the greatest possible preservation of the monument matter.

Dezzi Bardeschi very provocatively calls his approach "pure conservation", implying the priority of preserving the existing matter of the monument. The architect understands the restoration as a result or as the sum of two actions to improve the object: a primary action on conservation and a secondary project of the "new". Conservation is aimed at the maximum conservation of the matter of the monument in the environment, as well as its transfer to the future; while the new project is aimed at valorizing the heritage, that is, at increasing its complex value in the eyes of the recipient. The new project should contain a number of high-quality additions that would not only increase the total cost of the work but would also represent the culture of modernity to future generations and be a reflection of their era [4].

"So, today, we will say that restoration is any intervention that has the objective of permanence over time, however relative, of the physical consistency of the material Asset received as a legacy from history, of which we can guarantee the conservation of all its equipment and components in an active use (preferably the latter if still original or at least in any case of high compatibility and minimum consumption), to be pursued through appropriate and calculated new project contributions (functional, plant-technological, furniture), in view of its integral transmission in efficiency to the future" [4].

The definition of Dezzi Bardeschi comes from several beliefs. Firstly, during the restoration, free choice with the subsequent removal of those parts of the architectural object that are considered "unnecessary" or inappropriate from the point of view of probable aesthetic values should not be allowed. All

additions are accumulated equally through the palimpsest (definition: a manuscript written on parchment that was already in similar use). In Italian literature on restoration, the word "palimpsest" is often found and is defined not only as a "manuscript", but also as a process of accumulation of layers, a multilayer material culture. The removal of even one link in the chain of development of the monument is equivalent for the viewer to the loss of knowledge and involvement in the past life and life experience of the monument. That is why restoration should be equated with the conservation of existing matter in order to transfer it to the future so that it remains possible to read its layered matter. Secondly, the conservation project of the existing multilayer matter is not enough to maintain the monument. In order to transfer the monument in functional, economic and social suitability to the future, it needs to be supplemented with new material and technical components (technical, electrical, furniture) necessary to maintain the architectural object in good working condition. Thirdly, everything new, which is added if necessary, should have an autonomous character and good readability - it should be a clearly new work, a product that is self-contained, pictorial and material, clear and understandable expression of "our culture and our time". It follows that the objectives of the responsible restorer should be:

- *to conserve*, not to subtract other matter from the factory already tried by time and men;
- *valorization*, that is, adding to the original product new necessary elements. This addendum should not be an ambiguous imitation or passive quotation of the past, which cannot return, but should be a telling example of our time and our culture.

Attention is required to the value of the author's performance, as well as to the material authenticity of the monument's physical body: "I can hardly understand the irritated intolerance of the new project. The new cannot be demonized in favor of a dissociation and a more consoling fetishistic return to the masks of the past, as a self-fulfilling re-enactment in the image of an operetta. "Every century his art" was written in capital letters on the Secession building in Vienna" [7].

Thus, the restoration today, according to Dezzi Bardeschi, should be evaluated on the basis of two levels that should be well read in the work: the first level is the most advanced experimental data obtained in the framework of historical studies, drawings, anamnesis and diagnostics, and combined with the intervention, where priority is the preservation of the existing heritage; the second level is the valorization of heritage, compatible with the modern project [4].

IV. APPROACH OF "REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE"

The approach of Paolo Marconi (1933-2013), representing a direction of restoration thought alternative for Italy, can be arbitrarily called "repair and maintenance". The architect advocated design "by analogy," that is, design in forms and materials similar or seeking to repeat the materials of the past. Paolo Marconi gave the following definition of restoration: "Restoring means working on an architecture or an urban context in order to preserve them for a long time, when they were worthy of being appreciated and enjoyed by our descendants. The operator must ensure that the object of his work is handed down in the best conditions, also for the purpose of transmitting the meanings that the object has." [4].

Marconi wrote about the vulnerability of architecture, regretting the tradition of artistic thought and the artistic activity of the Florentine Academy of Fine Arts, which was based on the classical tradition, and from the end of the 19th century to the present day has been trying to forget that movable monuments are much more durable compared to architecture, since they are protected from the external environment by the roof of a church building or house, and therefore can exist for a long time, only periodically subjected to surface cleaning [8]. Architecture, among all the creations of human hands and everything connected with it, is most dependent on atmospheric phenomena, is susceptible to fires, earthquakes, is destroyed due to environmental pollution and aging of its own materials and structures, excessive use, which requires checking every 20-30 years status and directions of use.

In his publications and works, he actively criticized the Venice Charter [8], arguing that with the adoption of the Venice Charter in 1964 the restoration of architecture began to convert into conservation of architecture and the Italian restoration started to deviate from global practice. Brandy's ideas and concepts on restoration (characterized by the denial of stylistic hidden additions) were introduced into the 1964 Venice Charter, due to the fact that it was written in the absence of representatives of the English tradition of architecture, traditionally having calm attitude to the practice of reconstruction. P. Gazzola and R. Panet were, from Marconi's point of view, terrorized by the revolutionary onslaught of Brandi and his students. It was because of their pressure that Piero Gazzola "repented" of his old theoretical and practical mistakes - that he had restored two bridges in Verona (Castelvecchio bridge and La Pietra bridge) in their original form (*à l'identique*) and "transferred" the temple Abu Simbel in Egypt, and Roberto Pan is that he collaborated with Giovannoni on the Commission for the Regulatory Plan in Naples in 1926-27.

Marconi believed that in the world the Italian case is unique due to the lack of restoration work to restore to previous forms and materials. He was convinced that this situation was caused by the terror of previous decades in relation to counterfeits produced in huge quantities by craft workshops throughout the country. Marconi wondered what to do when the symmetrical bell tower collapses, or at least its cornice collapses, and the entire facade needs to be restored to its former symmetry? The architect believed that there was no other solution than to restore "where it was, as it was" (*dov'era, com'era*), as A. Riegl had already taught at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, advising some of his most devoted architect Bodo Ehardt I camouflage tricks to dampen the sense of novelty of additions [9].

Marconi recalled that stylistic restorations take place all over the world, with the exception of Italy, and cites the example of the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden. The architect also recalled a happy time when centuries changed, when Fiorelli² (1882-1932) reigned, allowing scientifically based reconstructions, as well as post-war reconstructions of the third quarter of the 20th century in Bologna, Florence, Genoa, Naples, Palermo, Rome, Syracuse, Taormina Montecassino etc. [10].

Marconi noted the periodicity of approaches: the widespread use of reconstructions in one historical period and the almost complete ban on them in another historical period, to which he ranks modernity until 2006. The architect focused on the fact that for the reconstruction, for example, the bell tower in the form in which it was built, a special project is needed, accompanied by painstaking drawings and studies, and this project requires preliminary preparation and with a high degree of return, a lot of research and understanding, as well as money, as opposed to conservation. Marconi censures the modern preservation-based approach saying that "not wanting to invest in the project, as Boyto suggested, our eminent modern architects, disappointed in the profession in which surveyors and engineers have already won, introduce linguistic innovations, as much baseless and stupid as different from the original context" [4].

V. CONCLUSION

Comparing the positions of theoreticians regarding restoration additions to architectural monuments, one can distinguish the following: Bardeschi and Carbonara

¹ For him the best conservation was restoration [electronic resource]. – Access mode: <https://architettura.unige.it/did/11/restauro/prim0405/storiarestauro/matdid/lez13aloisriegl.pdf>

² Mario Dalla Costa, Giovanni Carbonara. *Memoria e restauro dell'architettura: saggi in onore di Salvatore Boscarino*. FrancoAngeli, 2005, pp. 75–320.

are unanimous in recognizing that a work of art is unique and inimitable, it cannot be reproduced, since a monument is a complex substance consisting of many factors and circumstances. All additions made “in the previous forms” are not living and produce only the “mummy effect” [7], which has nothing to do with a living person. Stylistic restorations have no right to exist. Accordingly, the only way to transfer the heritage to the future is to preserve the existing matter. Marconi believes that architecture, as the most vulnerable art with a limited lifespan, should be updated in its previous forms, techniques and materials, otherwise a work of art can be literally lost after several restorations due to the endless addition of simplified additions that differ from the original material.

In relation to the conservation project and the new project, theorists have different views: Carbonara believes that the conservation project and the new project should be closely related to each other. Their internal connection should be deep, they do not need to be separated and opposed to each other, since restoration should strive for the potential unity of the image of a work of art, polysemantic and at the same time unified in its diversity. Bardeschi believes that the conservation project and the draft new additions should be strictly delimited. If a conservative project preserves the existing heritage, then modern inclusion should strive to increase its value. The value of the monument can be increased through the palimpsest, by adding another “layer” to the monument. The restoration architect needs to contribute to the heterogeneous structure of the monument, and he can do this only through the modern language of architecture. The new addition should reflect his contemporary culture and time. Marconi denies modern design as an entity. He believes that the best restoration is a repair that does not bring anything new except for improved techniques.

If Carbonara’s approach is dominated by the idea of the integrity of the image of the monument, and it is the integrity of the image that is the goal of critical conservative restoration, then Marco Dezzi Bardeschi has a second equivalent dominant - the increase in value through the addition of new matter. Paolo Marconi in the restoration puts in first place the physical unity of the building.

A comparative analysis of the approaches to the restoration of leading Italian architects in the XX-XXI centuries showed that despite the significant differences in theoretical concepts, these concepts are very noticeably softened in restoration practice. And often architects with diametrically opposed views join forces to work on a common project, for example, during the restoration of the church sanctuary in Potsuolli (the technical task was developed by Carbonara and the architectural project was completed by Dezzi Bardeschi), and they also very kindly comment on the

methodically alien works of their colleagues, as, for example, in the case of the cathedral in Noto [11].

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