

RESTORATION AND MODERNITY:

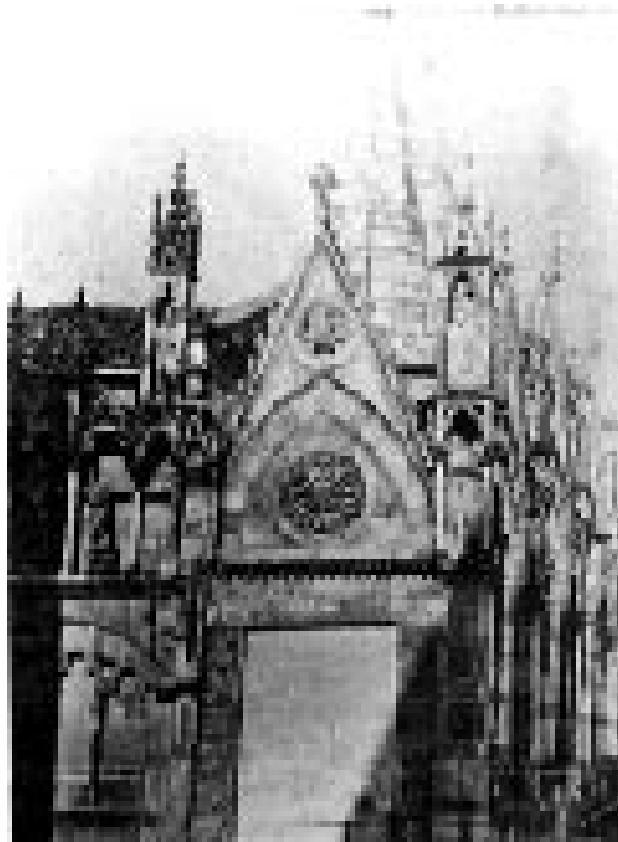
The Enigma of the Old in the Era of the New

Restoration is not architecture proper; it situates itself on the periphery of architecture. Hovering uncomfortably between refurbishment and architectural history, restoration appears as a supplement, as an addition built on to the edifice of architecture. The marginal position of restoration in architectural discourse contrasts sharply with its impact on architectural practice. The interest in heritage in western societies has today grown into a virtual industry, and restoration objectives effect architecture to an increasing extent. Indeed, conservation legislation is, in the western world at least, one of the strongest regulators directing the outcome of architectural projects at both urban and local scale. This thesis therefore suggests that it is crucial to investigate the narrative behind the phenomena of restoration; to uncover the enigma of the old in modern society.

This enquiry into the phenomena of restoration has a double agenda. Firstly its aim is to formulate a criticism of restoration in terms which go beyond "for" or "against". The thesis pursues that objective by, in one

sense, "restoring" restoration into the discourse of modern architecture, showing how the notion of heritage evolved and crucially participated in the shaping of modernity. However, the proposition that restoration is a modern phenomena, generated out of the events that radically transformed Western society around 1800, is not put forward in order to identify a point of origin for restoration; evidently the "caretaking" of buildings has, like architecture, no beginning. Rather the objective of the thesis is to understand the cultural role of restoration at a specific moment in history; to ask at what moment in history did the maintenance and renewal of buildings shift to a discursive practice of restoration generating a profession, schools and conflicts. Indeed when and why did the task of maintaining buildings become a site of conflict and contradicting desires?

Secondly the thesis uses its enquiry into the phenomena of restoration to reveal critical issues within the discourse of architecture itself. Authenticity, origin and authorship are concepts at the core of the polemic that has surrounded restoration throughout its



history. By studying that debate the aim is to reveal the dominant and complex status of these concepts within architecture and to rethink their role in the production of architecture. As a result the thesis will evolve around the object that restoration constructs, the monument, re-considering the notion of the monument through exploring the desires that lie behind what will be termed a "modern cult of monuments".

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first, "The Phenomena of Restoration", is an introductory chapter that starts with an overview of contemporary critical writing on restoration such as François Choay's *L'allegorie du patrimoine*; David Lowenthal's *Possessed by the Past*, *The Heritage Crusade* and *The Spoils of History*; Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry* and Patric Wright's *On Living in an Old Country*: *The National*

Past In Contemporary Britain. The shortcomings of such analyses of the role conservation are highlighted and it is pointed out how the critical objective of this thesis diverges from the views these authors represent. The chapter then outlines another mode for approaching and discussing heritage starting from E.J. Hobsbawm's and T. Ranger's essay "The Invention of Tradition", and continuing with a presentation of Alois Riegl's influential essay "Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung" (Vienna, 1903, translated as *The Modern Cult of Monuments; its Character and Origin*). This text that is crucial for the thesis' analysis of restoration as a narrative of longing shifting between nostalgic reconstructions of different, lost "pasts" and a melancholic recognition of the Past.

The second chapter "The French Revolution and the

Emergence of a Discourse of Restoration” looks at the notion of the monument historique as it developed out of the events of the French Revolution. By studying the effect the Revolution’s redistribution of property, the chapter relates the establishment of the concept to the iconoclasm of the Revolution. In so doing it sites the emergence of the discourse of conservation within the discourse on Revolutionary vandalism. The destruction of art under the Revolution has been a touchstone in the evaluation of the Revolution as whole. Radical historians have tended to play down the significance and effect of this iconoclasm. Conservative readings on the other hand have placed revolutionary vandalism at the beginning of a threatening genealogy of insurrection and anarchy contaminating the nineteenth century. The chapter argues that this type of interpretation poses a too simple opposition between the destruction of art and its conservation and shows how this binary opposition starts to break down if the Revolutionary notion of conservation is more carefully considered.

The third chapter “The Role of Photography in Viollet-le-Duc’s and Ruskin’s Notion of Restoration” reconsiders the notion of the authentic in restoration by studying Viollet-le-Duc’s theories of restoration and John Ruskin’s polemic against restoration using their comments on photography as points of reference. By specifically focussing on the effect the new media of photography exerted on nineteenth century notions of space and vision, an alternative framework in which to compare the ideas of Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin is explored. The close links that so rapidly developed between restoration and photography century were not expedient or coincidental, it is argued. Rather, these ties gained potency because the two disciplines were driven by similar desires, invested in concepts of time and nature that were undergoing a profound crisis of identity at this time.

The fourth chapter “Restoration in the Machine Age: Themes of Conservation in Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin” reconsiders the relationship between restoration and Modernism through an examination of Plan Voisin, Le Corbusier’s project to modernise Paris. The project has been used to point out the antithetical relation between the objectives of conservation and

the urban strategies of the Modern Movement. Plan Voisin has been described as a rational erasure of the historical past, *atabula rasa* that installed nature as the new foundation for the modern city. One aspect of the Plan Voisin radically alters this assertion: Le Corbusier’s intention of preserving a group of historical monuments within his scheme. These monuments, which for Le Corbusier signified the essence of Paris, were to be conserved in a park created through the erasure of the urban fabric. However radical, Plan Voisin shows that within the modernist agenda a perceptiveness to the historical monument can be read which relates to the discourse of conservation. By studying the emblematic project of Plan Voisin the objective of the chapter is to demonstrate that, rather than being antithetical, modernism and conservation are interdependent.

The last chapter “Origins and Reconstruction: Alois Riegl’s meditation on the Modern Cult of Monuments” examines the love for the old that marks contemporary society. No longer just the obscured passion of antiquarians, the mesmeric effect of the old has spread to all levels in society and is increasingly beginning to shape our physical surroundings. In considering this love for the old the chapter returns to Alois Riegl’s “*Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*”, already mentioned in the introduction to the thesis. This concluding chapter explores further the consequences of Riegl’s analysis by focusing specifically on his concepts of intentional and unintentional monuments. The aim is to put forward a critical interpretation of the forces behind contemporary society’s all pervasive preoccupation with heritage and restoration.

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