

TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE VALUES OF CULTURAL PROPERTY IN WESTERN TRADITION AND SCIENCE

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At the turn of the 21st century, two theoretical problems dominated international discussions among conservators: the authenticity of historical monuments and their non-material values. It may be suggested that, to a large degree, it is on the results of these discussions that the future development of conservation in the century that is just beginning will depend.

It is in the area of the so-called western culture –as opposed to the other broad cultural areas of the world – that we find the greatest difficulties with both of these concepts. This influences our narrower perception of the idea of cultural property. For conservators, it is mainly the material values of historical monuments that are encoded, and it is in those material values that the authenticity of a monument is perceived.

The explanation for these phenomena is not found either in the Judaic tradition, which concerned itself mainly with non-material values, or in the philosophy of ancient Greece or Rome. The theories of Plato in particular gave uncompromising priority to ideals over material aspects.

The origin of western 'materialistic' approach to the values of a historical monument lies in the Christian tradition. This belief lay behind the traditions of the cult of holy relics, being one of the bases for the doctrine of the Roman Church. This cult was and still is connected with the authenticity of their material substance. The cult of relics, at first limited to the bodies of holy martyrs, gradually widened its scope to include objects connected with holy people and with places imbued with their presence. In this manner architectural elements also attained the status of relics, and their authenticity depended entirely on their material substance. An important expansion, and at the same time secularisation of architectural relics, took place during the Italian Renaissance. It was in this manner that humanists regarded the ruins of ancient pagan Rome. Such approaches evolved into modern attitudes, expressed, for example, in the fragments of the Berlin Wall sold today to tourists like relics.

The tragic paradox of the cult of relics and icons is that their material substance was not in itself important. Relics were honoured for their non-material values, radiating as they did the grace of God, by means of which miracles could be worked.

The first European theory regarding the restoration of historical monuments, born and put into practice in the nineteenth century, was close to the philosophy of Plato. The principle of 'stylistic restoration' was based on the concept of the superiority of the ideal over the material. Original parts of the historical monument were removed in order to return it to the hypothetical ideal and original form.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the purist concept of restoration of historic monuments was rejected and condemned, making the material substance of the monument the basic object of the work of conservators. The basic criteria used in the assessment and evaluation of historic monuments were the artistic, architectural, technical, and historical values of their material substance. This shows the lack of communication between conservation and the social sciences (history, art history, sociology), which study the message and content (and thus the non-material values) of works of art and architecture, and the way in which they are reflected on social memory.

Change in western thought only took place by influences coming from the outside, from other cultural settings, namely, from the Far East and Africa.

Conflict with the Far East regarding the concept of authenticity, understood there in terms of form, function and tradition and based - among other things - on a belief in reincarnation led, for the first time, to a global discussion on this topic among conservators.

The second stimulus was to come from Sub-Saharan Africa. In this enormous cultural area, space and location are treated as symbolic categories, independently of their material form. The notion of non-material values of cultural property is in the African continent a basic and obvious one. However, the proposal on the part of the delegation of Zimbabwe to devote the colloquium accompanying the present General Meeting of ICOMOS to this problem aroused the disquiet of European conservators. It seemed as though we were not yet ready for a discussion on that topic.

Nevertheless, the consideration of the non-material values of architectural monuments and works of art has, in the West, already a tradition going back over a hundred years, although this has often been unnoticed or forgotten by today's European conservators.

Exactly a hundred years ago Alois Riegl, when analysing the non-material values of historical monuments, though not referring to them as such *expressis verbis* (since that concept was only formulated much later), differentiated and emphasised the *Erinnerungswert* – ‘memorial value’.

Developing the arguments of Riegl, one may consider that the memorial values of a work of architecture crystallise in two phases:

- its creation and materialisation,
- its life.

In the case of the former, we stand on the firm theoretical ground of Plato's ideas. The only ideal work of architecture is the one conceived and envisioned in the imagination of its creator. This vision then undergoes modifications in the course of construction, in overcoming material limitations and in the translation of the invisible into the visible. The materialisation of the work is the medium of the values (content) it encodes. In order to decipher them, one must deconstruct the route of its creator: carry out a translation of the material into the non-material, the visible into the invisible.

Less than half a century after the appearance of Riegl's work, another intellectual giant, Erwin Panofsky, created the foundations for the theory of that translation. Panofsky's iconological method is not an analysis of material works, but only their interpretation, based on a reading of the work as a fundamental historical source and on a deep knowledge ‘of the history of cultural phenomena and symbols, of how in changeable historical circumstances important tendencies in human consciousness are expressed with the aid of specific themes and concepts’. Despite cognitive limitations and the danger of over-interpretation, the development of research methods (especially in iconology and semiotics) have provided us the possibility of penetrating the material exterior of a work of architecture or art, in order to comprehend its inner meaning, the external historical circumstances that defined its artistic form, as well as its ideological content and function. Works of architecture embodying those phenomena will act as a source for the study of the history of the culture at the time in which it developed.

The non-material value is considerably more important in connection with the period of the ‘life’ of the work of architecture (historical monument). Architecture creates the spatial setting for facts and events of local, national or interregional significance. The greater the importance of the event, the greater its impact on public awareness will be and on the degree to which it is recorded in the annals of history and in social memory. In this manner, an architectural monument that was the backdrop of an event was a ‘silent witness’ to that happening, and gains a new dimension of ‘memorial values’, becoming a ‘place of memory’. A century ago, Alois Riegl did not fully recognise that dimension. He only went half-way, remarking prophetically that one of the components of ‘memorial values’ is that it: *„exhibits a tendency to capture a particularly historical moment from the past and embody it with such clarity as though it was contemporary’.*

The research of French historians and sociologists of the *Ecole des Annales* in the period between the two World Wars regarding social memory and its relationship to history confirmed Riegl's intuitive observation. They also initiated in the 1980s studies on ‘places of memory’, which were developed especially by French historian Pierre Nora, but that were followed by historians from several European countries who have been producing thick volumes devoted to ‘national places of memory’. The most recent of these is the monumental publication ‘German Places of Memory’. These authors propose the following definition: *‘Places of memory can be of both material and non-material nature – in today's languages we may call them ‘icons’. They comprise places of memory not due to their material objectification, but due to their symbolic function. We therefore understand ‘place’ as a metaphor, as topos. As a place in space (whether it is physical, social, political, cultural or imaginary)’.* In the case of ‘physical places of memory’, their present form is unimportant. That is why for a Frenchman (and not only) the Bastille is a place of memory, even though for more than a century it has ceased to exist, and for a German (and not only) the Berlin Wall is one as well, though it ceased to exist more than a decade ago.

The respect for physical relics or places that commemorate important events is nothing new. What is new, however, is the creation of a specific category of such places. Nevertheless, it is also characteristic that in the literature devoted to the subject, places of memory are not defined as non-material cultural property, sometimes connected to ‘place’ in physical form, but sometimes existing in another type of dimension. The desideratum of protecting them for their own values alone has not been postulated. Neither has the matter of the relationship between the symbolic values of a ‘place of memory’, connected by means of a physical place to the actual nature and appearance of that space, which, as a consequence, raises the question of whether and how we can protect the symbolic ‘place’ merely by preserving its physical expression. The entire ideology of ‘places of memory’ has become the domain of historians and sociologists. Conservators, on the other hand, have not yet really become fully aware of it as a conservation problem, of the notion of the protection of ‘places of memory’ as non-material cultural property, or of the problem of the preservation of a physical space that is, at the same time, a symbolic place of memory.

The conservation and protection of physical ‘places of memory’ embodying non-material cultural property has two practical aspects. The first one is the careful protection and preventive conservation of those places, which have preserved their physical form commemorating an event or events. The aim of such protection is the preservation of the ‘place’, unchanged and unspoiled by modern changes, in its ‘authentic’ state. The second aspect might, in specific cases, concern the recreation of the physical manifestation of a ‘place’ that has been affected by some cataclysm.

This brings us to the problem of rebuilding historical monuments and complexes – places of memory – that have been destroyed. Only in cases where the destroyed historical monument is saturated with non-material 'memory value' can we speak of a conservator's replica (in the walls of which are set – like relics – the preserved fragments of the 'authentic' material substance of the original). Already a hundred years ago Alois Riegl understood this when he wrote that *'although the cult of historical value reserves the full value of the historical source for the original state of a monument, in such a case as the original (evidence) has been irreparably destroyed it can admit a limited value to its copy'*, but only *"when the copy is intended as an auxiliary aid to scientific investigation"*, but not *"as a replacement of the full value of the original, demanding historical and aesthetic recognition"*.

From a twentieth century perspective, it appears that this excellent thinker made two mistakes in his judgement – being expressed as it was in the shadow of the collapse of the campanile of St Mark's in Venice.

A rebuilt historical monument cannot be an aid to scientific investigation, being, at best, iconographic evidence. Nevertheless with the passing of years, it attains historical and aesthetic recognition, as evidence of the history and culture of the period of its reconstruction and, in fact, its material witness. What is more, in some magical manner there is a sort of reincarnation. For the public, the monument acquires non-material 'memory values', despite full awareness of the fact that it is merely a copy. This concerns a single monument as well as urban complexes, historical gardens and cultural landscapes.

Re-reading a hundred years later the thoughts of Alois Riegl on the 'values of a copy', one may approach the problem as follows:

Conservation of historic monuments *sensu proprio* begins and ends when the authentic material substance of a monument exists. In this concept, the recreation or reconstruction of a destroyed historical monument belongs entirely to modern culture; in its conception, to cultural policy and, in the manner of its execution, to modern art and technology. But as part of modern culture it also belongs to conservation *sensu lato*, which includes (and may include) in particular cases the physical recreation of the artistic or ideological (non-material) image of a work, where the latter has physically ceased to exist as the result of some cataclysm.

These considerations on non-material cultural property may be summarised with a simple conclusion:

The great intellectual achievements of European and American scholars concerning the non-material values of cultural property, place the West at the forefront of theoretical reflections on this problem. These achievements, however, have not yet been fully recognised or applied in conservation; there is a great gulf between European humanities and conservation, which remains intellectually backward in its obsession with the material substance and unable to undertake the task of the balanced protection of both material and non-material cultural heritage.

At the same time, other cultural regions that are not involved in deep theoretical studies of the non-material values of cultural property – but instead draw from their own cultural traditions – have long ago found practical solutions to this problem. In this respect, the West has still much to learn from the East and the South. At the same time, it has much to offer them by way of the great intellectual achievements of its own humanists concerning the non-material values of cultural manifestations, a tradition going back to the thoughts of Classical Antiquity.

Both material and non-material values should be taken equally into account when assessing cultural property from the point of view of the (to use the phrasing of the Venice Charter) "full richness of their authenticity". Ignoring the equivalence of these aspects condemns western conservation to a prejudiced viewpoint, to valuing the material above the spiritual. It also demonstrates its isolation from current trends in modern science and the experiences of other cultural regions of the world.

One can and must believe that, due to international exchanges of views and experiences, the protection and restoration of non-material values of cultural property and their 'memory values', the recognition and treatment of material cultural property as 'places of memory', will characterise the further development of conservation in the coming century.

ABSTRACT

L'approche occidentale aux biens culturels immatériels se formait par étapes suivantes dès l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours:

1. La théorie platonique des idées proclame la **supériorité de l'idéal** d'une oeuvre d'art créée dans l'imagination du créateur **sur la matérialisation** de cet oeuvre;
2. **Le culte des reliques** des saints développé au sein de l'Eglise chrétienne occidentale, bien que basé sur l'authenticité de leur substance matérielle, a **pour le but principal la protection de leurs valeurs spirituelles**, en tant que la source rayonnante de la grâce divine;
3. La philosophie de la "**valeur mémorable/memorial value**" des biens matériels, développée par les créateurs de la conservation occidentale moderne ("*Erinnerungswert*" – Alois Riegl 1903 et les autres)
4. Les études méthodologiques des historiens d'art européens/américains sur **le contenu idéologique et les messages immatériels** des oeuvres d'art et d'architecture: **la iconologie** (Ady Warburg; Ervin Panofsky et les autres);
5. Les études méthodologiques des historiens et des sociologues français sur la mémoire sociale – "**les places de la mémoire**" matérielles et immatérielles (Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora et les autres)

La conclusion: Une grande contribution intellectuelle des savants occidentaux, dédiée aux valeurs immatérielles des biens culturels n'était est mise à profit pour la conservation occidentale. Il existe une grande discordance entre les sciences humanistes et la conservation, qui reste en arrière en fétichisant seulement la substance physique des monuments et des sites, et qui oublie son devoir de protéger en même mesure le patrimoine matériel et immatériel. Dans ce domaine l'Occident doit apprendre beaucoup des autres grandes régions culturelles du monde. Mais il peut et il doit leur servir d'un grand capital intellectuel des humanistes occidentaux dédié aux biens culturels immatériels, qui a une tradition de plus de deux et demi millénaires.

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