

The figure of Paolo Marconi can inevitably be found in any architectural heritage conservation debate which might have taken place in Italy in the 60's (and Italy, in those years, is, of course, the very focal point of all such debates throughout Western Culture). His name was not exempt from controversy and from a lively confrontation of viewpoints. He is a relevant landmark, both for the theory and for the practice of architecture. His work showed a singular brilliance and resolution right up until his last days; till that 13th August on which he left us all in Rome, his beloved city, and deprived us all of his acute thought and of that infrequent, ironical, lucid and critical ability with which he carried on defending his strong –daring, sometimes- positions.

With his degree as an architect in 1958, he was interested in the study and conservation of architectural heritage from the very first steps of his professional career; precisely, in those moments, after World War II's devastating damage, in which the practical reality of restoration –if not a true '*reconstruction*'- of buildings and monuments ran in a very different direction from the principles set out in the Athens Charter (1931). Already, in his student years, he would very closely follow the reconstructions of the two historical bridges in Verona. At that moment, his father, the architect Plinio Marconi, was setting out the Piano di Ricostruzione¹ of this city; and both bridges (the medieval one of Scaligero and the Roman Ponte Pietra), which had been destroyed by the German army's retreat (F2), were being reconstructed by Piero Gazzola according to the motto '*com'erano e dov'erano*'.² Naturally, Marconi always defended these reconstructions and other similar post-war works; and he even came to upbraid Gazzola for his later complete self-critical exercise (following the line of the Athens Charter principles)³. Marconi's idea of *restauro all'antica* occupied a central place in his restoration theory and in his work as a practising architect. '*Reconstruction in style*' practice, so criticized at that time (and explicitly condemned by the Athens Charter), was defended by Marconi with the naturalness of one who has witnessed buildings being repaired and has had to intervene in them; with the naturalness, above all, of one who knows the constructive-formal process of architecture.

Com' era e dov' era? The Psychological Dimension

Marconi stressed the popular appeal –the emotional and symbolic appeal- which lay behind and justified the idea of a replica reconstruction. He always stressed the *psychological dimension*, superimposed on both aesthetic and historical Brandian planes. Such a dimension was spontaneously produced whenever the public was faced with the traumatic disappearance of monuments and historical sites. One thinks here of war conflicts (Montecassino, Frauenkirche in Dresden, the Mostar Bridge); acts of terrorism; earthquakes; fires such as the one which destroyed La Fenice in Venice... Marconi explained how historical –à l'identique- reconstructions were supported by popular feeling together with a large public outcry. Representative cases, among others are: the reconstructions of the *Trinità Bridge in Florence and the Saint Mark campanile in Venice* (both of them, explicitly censured by Brandi). In this sense, Marconi pointed out to what extent the inhabitants' great enthusiasm, '*a furor di popolo*', was the cause of the ripristino of the cathedral of Venzone, after it had been ruined by the earthquake of 1976.⁴ He further illustrated his point by showing how the rebuilding of the church of San Giorgio in Velabro in Rome, destroyed largely by an act of terrorism (1993), was also due to '*the thrust of popular affection, as happened immediately after World War II*'.⁵ In the debate about the replica reconstruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden (completely destroyed in the 1945 bombardment and whose ruins remained as an anti-war commemorative monument till the last moments of the German Democratic Republic), Marconi celebrated the "collective iron will –hence, the political

The 'Replica sapiente'. Some thoughts on the Theoretical Legacy of Paolo Marconi (Rome, 1933-2013)

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will- to restore the church to its city". This was the internationally so-called "Dresden appeal" (Ruf aus Dresden). In this reconstruction, given the support of the British company Dresden Trust, he could see a clear example of reconciliation of nations which had clashed in war; and he would regret that such actions –carried out with naturalness in other countries- did not find their way to Italian ground.

In Italy, even the reconstruction of the Trinità Bridge in Florence, carried out by the Americans and acclaimed by the Florentines with enthusiasm, had been unambiguously criticized by Brandi. Applying an identical line of argument to the one used against the reconstruction of the San Mark campanile, he said: *if missing elements were works of art themselves, the possibility of their being reconstructed like copies is completely out of the question.*

The atmosphere should be reconstructed according to the special data of any disappeared monuments, and not to any formal considerations. (...) a Santa Trinità Bridge must be put up again, but it cannot be Ammannati's Bridge.

Beyond these and other cases -which followed popular initiative-, the defense of "redesigning" as a replica was extended by Marconi to the destructions and sventramenti which had already become "consolidated" or accepted over time. So, he gladly welcomed Leonardo Benevolo's risky proposal to rebuild the old Borgo vaticano (in his own words, Marconi referred to it as '*magnificent*'). The Borgo had been demolished to open the great via della Conciliazione (F3): the destruction of the spina del Borgo, carried out by Mussolini in 1936 (with architects Piacentini and Spaccarelli), obviously betrayed and put an end to 'Bernini's brilliant inspiration';⁶ but: How to staunch this amputation (which –even in the most superficial aspects- has so badly healed)?

Benevolo declared precisely what he intended to do with this restauro urbano: *'My project aims to cure a wound. I know it will not be easy in the short term. But I did it in any case, hoping that somebody would take it into account sooner or later... I'm aware of the difficulties of that project'*⁷. Marconi, taking up the challenge, went on with just such a theoretical proposal.

This exercise centered on conceptual aspects already posed by Benevolo and aspects which were essential to Marconi's own thought (and, as is obvious, they were rejected by the conservationist line). Such aspects, depending on the type of building to be treated of, set out diverse methodological practices of ripristino: philological, typological and volumetric practices. Marconi applied similar principles of urban renewal to cases of '*redesigning*' of outstanding axes in Rome, as academic exercises for his students at the Facoltà di Architettura: via Giulia (F4) and via della Lungara, Castel San'Angelo and Lungotevere, Porto di Ripetta...

The extension of the concept of restauro filologico is formulated by Marconi from the architectural to the urban scale, with no break in continuity. However, –he thinks- the requirement of the philological method must be accomplished. That is to say, to put together formal, documentary, typological and constructive studies and researches to reach an understanding of the object in its context. If this condition is maintained, he finds no reason to not reintegrate buildings in historical centres: in other words, to substitute domestic or monumental buildings which might have been pulled down by natural catastrophes or by human hand. This requires, in any case, an adequate knowledge of the monument's language: *'in the same way that a philologist intervenes to restore a mutilated or illegible text, interpolating it with a language with close affinities to the text'*; and, especially –he adds- *'when such a ripristino has been demanded by the clamour of the inhabitants and –even more- the whole of civil society.'*

Knowledge and Practice. Craft as a Heritage Value

These considerations are founded -with coherence and from a disciplinary architectural point of view- on constructive practice value. Marconi explicitly based his idea of the '*integral architect*' on his father's example (Plinio Marconi had set up a very strong link between theory and practice in architecture and urban planning); and, also, on a deeply rooted family tradition. He liked to remember he came from a long line of architects, masons, musicians, artists and artisans, all of them able to produce skilled works with their hands (as with our hands –he said- architecture, arte meccanica par excellence, is produced).⁸

Marconi's practice in historic buildings was backed up by a deep knowledge of constructive reality, through the reading of the building itself. This was helped by his very opportune building manuals and by his overseeing of the craftsmen. The co-operation between traditional systems, materials and possibilities of modern technology opened new fields of experimentation to him. In his own real restorations (the theatre of Carignano in Turin, for instance), he followed the same approach which he admired in other replica interventions such as the Frauenkirche in Dresden (where he wondered what could be held against that '*so grandiose and –at the same time- so detailed a work, so exactly reconstituted, having recourse to a courageous optimization due to modern technologies*'.⁹ When he goes on to defend some very salient –and, from other standpoints, very contested- replica works (as is the case with the stoa of Attalos in the Agora of Athens or the already quoted Frauenkirche in Dresden), he does not forget to remark upon the merit that these experiences deserve in reclaiming '*a craft which was at risk –as in Italy- of disappearing in those years*'.¹⁰ Marconi's defense of traditional crafts conservation has a very deep meaning. In such a defense, he puts forth a claim for a new heritage value, going beyond Brandi's dimensions and even Riegl's centenarian –but so current- axiology. He finds a specific worth in craft conservation: a question, obviously, that might well come into conflict with the Eurocentric value of authenticity (but, in any case, would be perfectly acceptable to Eastern Cultures). Together with this, there is another question which powerfully absorbed his attention and pushed him to study the paths of semiotics: the transmission of expressive codes in architecture. Umberto Eco argues that, apparently, architectural objects '*don't communicate (at least, they haven't been conceived to communicate), but they work*'; however, he adds, architecture, given that it is culture, must therefore also be communication. Marconi takes this point of view when he underlines the extent to which it has been forgotten how architecture communicates through codes which are known and recognizable. He observes: '*otherwise, it would be a self-referential performance, aimed at being appreciated only insofar as it is different from the rest*'. The importance of this assertion is perfectly well understood in the Italian milieu, where there is so great a number of architects –as Marconi notes- in fierce competition with one another. The communication aspect ties directly in with Marconi's reflections on the necessary renewal of architecture teaching. His preoccupation with the training of architects and how that has evolved through history –already registered in his early theoretical works and publications- was kept up for his whole professional career. This position was clear, for example, when faced with the *artistification* being promoted in the teaching of architecture: a reduction –he thought- to a visual effect or an ambiguous opera d'arte; the various training programs and Plans of Studies which serve to overlay the creative at the expense of the interpretative subjects. Such a teaching concentrates on the design of new buildings, differentiated on purpose, much more than on the interpretation of pre-existing architecture: this latter he judges to be absolutely necessary as the

'key-subject matter for architectural restoration: the 'ideal restitution' of the diverse phases through which the specific piece of architecture has passed'.

He considered that a good restorer architect should know how to rebuild the fragments of monuments deteriorated by time, '*in order to conserve their architectural meaning*'. He was aware, however, of the difficulty of any such effort. It would be a greater challenge, of course, than that faced by those who defend the –more or less well defined- confrontation between the old and the new). In this sense, Viollet-le-Duc's thought resounds (when he referred to the contemporary incapacity to repeat -with constructive reason- past architectural beauty): '*(...) we like to revenge with scorn the knowledge that we don't have (...) but to despise doesn't mean to prove*'. Marconi's particular emphasis on philology as a methodological model for the restoration of architecture is based on such a knowledge of the language and process of construction. Only a good connoisseur of language could interpolate a word which is fallen from a text. He asserts that an appropriate philology of architectural texts can only start from particular cultural conditions in which '*the knowledge of architecture also deepens the technical-scientific aspect*'. He thinks this aspect has been devalued in recent decades, with the risk of reducing '*architectural ideation to a mere figurative improvisation, neglecting the correspondence of the architectural object to a recognizable code*'. In this sense, we might consider his frequent and complimentary comments on the architects who, from the knowledge of construction and traditional crafts, have been capable of rescuing and conserving old buildings. An example of a restorer architect, that he liked to underline in the Spanish field, was the figure of Enrique Nuere. Marconi admired him for his material mastery in wooden construction. Nuere made it possible to reconstitute structures, until not much before then, held incapable of restitution; and he had done this with the naturalness of wooden craft, which possesses its own constructive reason and goes beyond the principles of any purely theoretical doctrine.

In this sense, Marconi's Manuali del recupero are particularly exemplary. In them, we can find graphically registered constructive procedures of Italian traditional architecture; approaches, in each case, specific and made to be taught, diffused and conserved (walls, wooden structures, flooring...). Beyond the restauro all'antica, Marconi's idea of such a necessary return to an eco-sustainable architecture, rests on the recuperation of historical processes and materials; procedures which do not presuppose the immeasurable energy cost of materials (such as titanium, glass, aluminium) so often used in contemporary works and in the projects of Architecture students. Today, the composition of these Manuali, together with the teaching of works and factfiles have attained a particular –probably urgent, essential- significance.

Replica or falsification

With the replica or falsification disjunctive, we enter the kernel of the question. The structuring –and, of course, controversial- argument in Marconi's thought lies in the differentiation between both concepts: replica and falsification. He formulates this difference with a specific character for the case of architecture. Brandi, in his Teoria del Restauro, notes that the principles he set up for the restoration of works of art in general are also "valid" for the restoration of architectural monuments. Marconi, however, had already pointed out his radical dissension from the Siensian historian's viewpoint on this aspect –as he had disagreed with so many other of his points. To begin with, Marconi affirms that equating architectural restoration to the restoration of a picture made by a painter's hand "is completely unfitting and even irrational". For him, the case of architecture doesn't bear any relationship to the case of prodotti autografi.

He thinks that the architectural heritage good is not so much the work of a single hand but, rather, the result of 'a long chain of interpretations of all those that execute the project' (when it is not the result of alterations due to upkeep or re-use). However, above all, Marconi beholds architectural heritage from the formal dimension angle –recupero della bellezza-; and this is irreconcilable with Brandi's standpoint, that is, architectural restoration is governed by 'the historical and the aesthetic dimensions'; and, consequently, calibrating and the critical weighing-up of every different case are required.

So, where Marconi's theory –and practice- of restoration is most directly at loggerheads with Brandi's is in the negation of one of Brandi's firmest principles (a principle which would become the restorer architect's great obsession): to avoid, at all costs, the idea of falso storico; and, consequently, to guarantee the distinguibilità, the need to distinguish the intervention –with more or less suitable criteria.

Such a question, essential in the formation of contemporary safeguard culture, had already been advanced by Camillo Boito, a long time before. In his *Questioni pratiche di Belle Arti*, he had formulated a very precise idea of *authenticity*; and here, in his off-quoted otto punti del restauro, he had set out unmistakable measures in order to assure the differentiation (regarding style, materials, simplification of profiles and ornaments...) between added and original parts.¹¹ Following this line and reacting against the excesses carried out by the supporters of stylistic restoration, the Athens Charter (1931) put the stress on the value of buildings as historical documents; and it did this at a vital moment: the formation of modern architecture. So, this Charter, in contemporary safeguard culture, affirmed the notion of falso storico (in other words, the idea of the *fake document*). This idea was included in the *Carta italiana del restauro* (1932), when it points out that we should proceed '(...) in such a way that never a restoration carried-out could deceive the scholars and represent the falsification of a historical document'.¹²

And, following this line, the *Istruzioni per il restauro dei Monumenti* (of the Public Education Ministry of Italy, 1938) would crisply forbid any stylistic reconstructions, affirming that they 'represent a double falsification, regarding the old and the recent history of art'.¹³ However, as we have seen above, the massive destruction which World War II supposed in Europe (and the great amount of restorations and reconstructions of monuments and historical centers) necessarily led to a deep change in those principles. In this context (a context that was taken for granted by The Hague Convention, 1954)¹⁴, Brandi's *Teoria del Restauro* appeared (1963); and its principles were immediately incorporated into the Venice Charter (1964). In this, the idea of documental falsification of a monument was kept (art. 9): '(...) any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp'.¹⁵ Marconi's opposition to marking any such "stamp" in the architectural and formal reality of a monument is very clear. His answer to those who (like Boito) would attempt to give a modern appearance to the added parts was an expressive *reductio ad absurdum*. In that case, Marconi mocked that we should be transforming 'the old monuments with our modern reintegrations', every generation, every time we have to repair them because of inevitable decay.¹⁶ He illustrated this idea with a graphic irony applied to the Arch of Titus restoration (the starting point and 'programmatic manifesto of modern restauro'). In his well-known drawing he shows a possible current restoration of the Arch, supposing that erosion of time has already acted on the original, marble columns (but not yet acted on the simplified, travertine ones from Stern and Valadier's 19th century intervention). Here, humorously, Marconi imagines all

the new elements which a contemporary architect's action would have to exert in order to differentiate his work from the other; and, consequently, he substituted the last original capital for another *sincerely modern* one (F5).¹⁷ In Marconi's thought, the aesthetic dimension prevails –without other considerations- over the historical one. In any case, his idea about what is or is not *falsification* leads him through very different paths from those of Brandi. In Brandi's work, it is interesting to take into account the intentionality of the one who produces or puts onto the market the falso storico or the falso artistico (the latter is, really, a *subspecies* of the former). Still Marconi goes beyond that when he points out the possible reason why Italy is the country where the authenticity value has been defended with more energy. He connects this circumstance with the large-scale industry of *falsification* of antiquities, rooted in Italy at least since the times of the Grand Tour; and, hence, with the old distrust with respect to duplications and copies of mobile art objects which are *exportable and marketable as fakes*. From these standpoints, Marconi –following Eco's correspondent theory- infers that *the value of authenticity is, hence, an eminently commercial value*.¹⁸ He argues that restoration in architecture shouldn't be considered a *falsification* because there is no motivation to deceive, insofar as the duplicated is not introduced onto the market as authentic (as would be the case of a false picture or a false document or a false coin). In the end, he denounces, the Italian use of calling *falsification* to refer to *reintegration in architecture*. For him, in essence, the criminal action of those who fake art objects has nothing at all to do with the action of those who undertake an architectural replica with a very different purpose (and necessary, many times –he quotes-, for real conservation).

Paolo Marconi was born in Rome; and here he spent the biggest part of his life. He studied Rome and loved it with enthusiasm; he delighted in its architecture and had the opportunity of conserving and restoring its Renaissance and Baroque monuments by the great architects (by Bramante, the cloister of Santa Maria della Pace; by Borromini, the tempietto di San Giovanni in Oleo; by Pietro da Cortona, the church dei Santi Luca e Martina in the Forum...) He also intervened in significant 19th century architectural wholes, such as the Palazzo della Giustizia (the well-known Palazzaccio). In his first years as an architect –steering his career, decidedly, towards restoration- he worked in the Soprintendenza ai Monumenti di Roma, directed by Riccardo Paccini. As a restorer architect, he worked on other monumental wholes in Italy (Basilica palladiana in Vicenza, Casa delle Nozze d'Argento in Pompey, the Carignano Theatre in Turin, the Zisa in Palermo, Castel Sant'Elmo in Naples, palazzo del Broletto in Brescia, Castello in Ferrara, the city center of Orvieto, the cathedral of Cefalu...). Together with his professional works as a restorer, besides the studies of buildings themselves, he produced very relevant written contributions on respective architects; that is the case, for instance, with Guglielmo Calderini and the Palazzaccio. Throughout his whole work he knew how to keep to the strict coherence between theory and practice that he always defended as a base for architecture. So, complementary to his task as an architect, he developed a long and intense academic labour. This extended to a great amount of publications (many of them, true key-stones to fix the state of the art in the current field of architectural conservation). Marconi further nourished with content and debates the scuola romana del restauro. Already in his first books, as in his essential biography of Valadier, he clearly set up the reflection on heritage dimension in architecture and on the history of restoration. Throughout the years, with an undismayed constancy, he produced innumerable works, which he produced innumerable works, which were basic to understanding the current, complex –and also contradictory- situation of architectural and urban heritage. Some examples of this are: *Arte e cultura della manutenzione dei*

monumenti (1984); *Il restauro e l'architetto. Teoria e pratica in due secoli di dibattito* (1993); *Dal piccolo al grande restauro. Colore, struttura, architettura* (1998); *Materia e significato. La questione del restauro architettonico* (1999); *Il recupero della bellezza* (2005); *and Restauro dei monumenti. Cultura, progetti e cantieri. 1967-2010* (2012). In co-operation with other authors, he took part in such seminal works as the study on architectural teaching in Italy (Marconi, Gabetti, Brino 1968) or the very opportune catalogue of drawings of the Accademia di San Luca (Marconi, Cipriani, Valeriani 1974). In the bosom of this prestigious Academy (so relevant in the modern culture of architectural conservation, ever since this subject was started in the beginnings of 19th century), he was a member from 1973 on and developed very pertinent actions. His teaching career was initiated in the Facoltà di Architettura of Rome (1966). He was, later, awarded the Chair of Storia dell'Architettura in Palermo (1976); and, in 1980, the Chair of Restauro dei Monumenti in La Sapienza of Rome. When Roma Tre University was created, he moved there (1993) and, here, he was the creator and director of the International Master Course in Restauro architettonico e recupero della bellezza dei centri storici, which he occupied till his last days. His teaching extended beyond Italy, and his participation as a professor of Teoria e tecnica del restauro of the Scuola Archeologica Italiana in Athens should be remarked. Also, in the School of Architecture of Madrid, we had the opportunity to receive some of his lectures. In 2010, on the occasion of an official scholarship for the "mobility of teachers", he imparted a week-workshop in the Official Master Course in *Conservación y restauración del patrimonio arquitectónico*.¹⁹

This meeting with teachers and students excited –as was foreseen- a lively debate, with not a few questions and contrasted opinions. Against those who, in a strong way, objected to his points of view and defended –in opposition to Marconi's theory- the principle of simplification in reintegrated parts or recognizable restoration or, simply, appealed the confronto antico/nuovo set up by Giovanni Carbonara (his partner and antagonist in the scuola romana), he showed –also in this field- his saper fare. He answered with an audacity and naturalness which disconcerted them all. He did this from a wide knowledge of the profession, of history and of construction; he believed in, he still had hopes for, architectural discipline. With his ironic and friendly smile, smoking his toscanelli and imposing with his voice –with a histrionic sense of humour- when he quoted Brandi's well-known sentences (or Boito's rhymes: '*Far io devo così che ognun discerna essere l'aggiunta un'opera moderna*'), he opened perspectives even for those who did not share his hypotheses at all. From this, we have kept –and we shall go on- discussing his arguments and appreciating from what well-defined standpoints he wanted to contemplate things and contribute a necessary cogitation on the state of the art. One of these evenings, after having held a very long debate in the Master Course, when we were in the car, going to dinner, he showed a particular interest in looking at Moneo's extension to the Bank of Spain. We had to take a short trip all around. As we were driving along the paseo del Prado, he contemplated all the buildings with a rare avidity. '*Ah! How much beauty!*', he exclaimed; and, for me, it was surprising that an architect used to living in Rome, and to intervene in its great monuments, could experience such delight in Madrid.

This was not just a visiting courtesy formula –in the always affable Marconi-. No! Immediately, I was aware that he was really enjoying the contemplation –the knowledge- of buildings which passed swiftly by the car window... I thought that this –almost sensory- delight for architecture, for the riconoscibilità della bellezza, was an eloquent complement to his lectures in our School of Architecture. It was something that gave us the key-stone not only to understand –judge?- his work and his

theory but also, to extrapolate, to reflect on other ideas. Quite probably, beyond ideological formulations and positions on architectural restoration, there is at basis another necessary -but not sufficient- condition: and that isto to know how to enjoy the architecture aesthetic dimension (which, even in the most reductionist of cases, does not imply excluding the historical one - if we want to use the Brandian term).

For this aesthetic dimension, for this recupero della bellezza, Marconi showed us the path; very often, a long and strenuous path: the one of integral knowledge of architectural fact, its history, its social function and its psychological dimension, its mechanics, its constructive practice, its materials and crafts. He showed how we should '*listen*' to the building, to observe and to respect it in all its complexity and context, as a step previous... to put in our hands on it. So, we can understand that those who had closely treated with him, and worked with him, defend Marconi as one of the few voices who '*till the end has tried to make all architects think about the complexly difficult relationship between the old and the new in architecture*'.

To know before acting, the uso sapiente of architecture, is a message which has opened up for architects and for the Schools and Faculties which must train them. It is a lesson that -from positions close to or distant from his- we should register in the frame of architectural heritage culture in where -with more doubts than certainties- we have to move.



PAOLO MARCONI
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REPLICA RECONSTRUCTION
20TH CENTURY ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE
RECONSTRUCTION IN STYLE