

“IDENTICAL” RECONSTRUCTION AND HERITAGE AUTHENTICITY

In 1994, the document of Nara had concluded that authenticity was a relative concept that was to be understood within a certain cultural context. But in opposition with the Japanese tradition, Western criteria of authenticity seemed not to agree with the concept of « true to original » reconstruction. Nevertheless, since then, a large number of reconstruction projects have been conceived or carried out in Europe, that question the conservationist and the art historian, for they seem not to be supported by any coherent philosophy, and border on relativism. The reconstruction of important monuments or city centers has often been understandably chosen in the immediate post-war context, in Munich, Ypres or Mostar. But more recent concrete projects (rebuilding the Berlin royal Palace, the savior Church in Moscow or the Dresden Cathedral) or imaginary ones (reconstruction of the Saint-Cloud and Tuileries Palaces in France) are much more problematic regarding their political and philosophical justifications. This attitude questions us especially since it seems to be more and more accepted in the current conservation practice: a very good illustration of this has been given by the debate closing the 2010 issue of the French very serious journal *Monumental* devoted to “Completion – restitution – reconstruction”, where the experts only focus on practical questions, while eluding more fundamental philosophical ones. This departure from the principles and spirit of the main twentieth century conservation charters seems to encounter the mainstream of cultural capitalism and one of its major economical sectors: tourism. In many cases, this very concrete reason is obviously more important than any identity consideration and reduces the distance between heritage and theme parks. These considerations, together with some recent publications (from Wim Denslagen and Bianca Gioia Marino to the INTBAU Association) and the adoption by the general assembly of ICOMOS, in December 2011, of a resolution regarding reconstruction, show clearly that our position regarding authenticity is still to be defined. Another layer of complexity is added to this rather blurred position on authenticity when we consider some of the more traditional interpretations of authenticity in the Eastern contexts, particularly India. That is the reason why we think that a round table or a paper session about this topic would be quite useful.

This roundtable or session could include case studies and/or theoretical approaches, both of them aiming to clarify the still vague concept of authenticity in relation to so-called “identical” reconstruction. These could be based on contemporary or historical subjects, and handled through multidisciplinary approaches including philosophy, history, architectural theory, sociology, anthropology and other disciplines.

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