Chapter 13
Design and Restoration: A Holistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a design based approach which is focused on the human dimension in all its complexity to give value not only to a functional or rational use of spaces, but also to an experiential one, gaining further significant inspiration from the memory layered in complex historical spaces. Interestingly, psychological studies highlight the collective base characterizing a number of disorders and suggest that changing the outside world can be just as therapeutic as changing the subject’s feelings, indicating that psychology merges with ecology. From an intersection between design, psychology and restoration, emphasizing a cultural inclination more than a technicistic attitude, opportunities seem to develop to promote beauty, identity and memory as essential dimensions for collective and individual well-being. Design oriented processes could bring out the potential of the built environment, promoting multiple functions and reuse methods, inspired by quality and capable of creating hospitable and welcoming physical and relational spaces. ¹

INTRODUCTION

The obvious and rational lack of confidence in unlimited development and the urgent need to stop the systematic consumption of land, energy, and both built and natural heritage, calls for increased attention being given to the potential of existing built heritage for both housing and experience. This puts interior design ahead of the key challenge of reusing existing urban spaces, often characterized by relevant historical architectural features, as providing hospitable interior atmospheres. On the other hand, the object of restoration has progressively expanded from monumental buildings to a diffusely built patrimony and eventually to the landscape, thus basically covering the world where people live every day. Besides, in the sixties of the twentieth century, Pane (1987) dealt for the first time with the relationship

between architecture, memory and psychology and stated that in addition to the aesthetic and historical duality which had been put forward by Brandi (1963), psychological aspects should also be taken into account. Interestingly, psychology seems to widen its scope, going beyond its traditional confines which correspond to the limits of the subject, and moving towards the urban space.

In the chapter, reciprocity and mutual collateralities between restoration, psychology and interior design will be discussed, by analyzing some concepts such as memory, beauty and ecology which seem relevant to all the disciplines considered. An innovative attempt will be made to integrate different fields of knowledge that have commonly been held separate, with the aim of creating connections and meeting places rather than lines of exclusion. Assuming that unusual points of view may be useful for each discipline to step outside its own boundaries - to “get lost” - in order to find its reasons also in adjacent areas, to promote a greater sensitivity toward urban and environmental spaces and to open wider design possibilities.

**RESTORATION VS BEAUTY**

*Guided by his sense of beauty, an individual transforms a fortuitous occurrence [...] into a motif, which then assumes a permanent place in the composition of the individual’s life. [...] Without realizing it, the individual composes his life according to the laws of beauty even in times of greatest distress. It is wrong, then, to chide the novel for being fascinated by mysterious coincidences [...], but it is right to chide man for being blind to such coincidences in his daily life. For he thereby deprives his life of a dimension of beauty. (Kundera, 1985, p. 52)*

Architectural restoration is generally considered to be any kind of intervention that allows a building to recover its function and be preserved. It was defined by Cesare Brandi as the «methodological moment in which the work of art is appreciated in its material form and in its historical and aesthetic duality, with a view to transmitting it to the future» (Brandi, 2005, p. 230). In this respect, Carbonara (1996) questions if, in order to meet the historical and aesthetic requirements of the ancient monument, it is absolutely necessary to restore it according to procedures that are formally “indifferent” or “neutral”, albeit “scientifically” reliable. The possibility he envisages is to give back to the architectural element not only a worthy physical context, but also a figurative aspect, which of course can be neither the original - lost or irrecoverable - nor that of an atrophied and incomprehensible image too badly damaged. The new context has to derive from placing the object in a new “artistic work” where it maintains an independent legibility, while joining new elements. In this respect, the design process is not too different from that of the interior design.

In recent decades, despite Brandi clearly stating the predominance of the aesthetic requirements², among different theoretical positions, the Italian debate has seen an ideological rejection of aesthetic values in the name of an illusory neutrality of integral conservation. The term conservation has even substituted that of restoration, as though the latter had become obsolete. Besides being methodologically disputable, this attitude risks resulting in bad interventions with a consequent dangerous estrangement of people from art, thus producing a worse intangible damage (disaffection) than the material abandonment. By considering restoration as a multidisciplinary subject, a rigid distinction between the project of “conservation” and the project of “innovation” should be overcome, focussing on the complex stratification that characterizes every city and landscape. It is worth mentioning Rogers’ position (1958) that