

Interdisciplinary Research in the Field of Conservation: the Role of Analytical Philosophy in Authenticity Assessment

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... and a building or performance executed under the direction of the designer or composer, while a more personal product and perhaps much better (or much worse) than another building or performance from the same plans or score, is not therefore a more authentic or original instance of the work (Goodman 1976, pg. 220).

In a most enlightening article, Françoise Choay recounts the history of the concept of authenticity and, after having shown how the term went through significant semantic shifts throughout its history, she does not hesitate to make a wish that “all patrimonial disciplines should trade the rhetorics of authenticity for a set of operating concepts” (Choay 2000, pg. 93). To understand this seemingly sceptical stance, one must probably remember that the major conservation charters have implicitly suggested since Venice (1964) that the concept of authenticity is a matter of common sense and that the term can therefore be used absolutely, as if it were a universal truth shared by all cultures, as part of a common policy of selecting UNESCO’s world heritage. Yet it has to be reminded that certain Japanese traditions, such as the reconstruction of the Ise temples, had led experts to question this assertion, as they seemed to be in opposition with the Western notion of material authenticity. However, despite the conference organised to that effect in Nara in 1994¹, and although specialists made repeated efforts to redefine the concept and make it more flexible, things may still be described as quite ambiguous, as shown by the numerous books and articles published ever since on the matter of authenticity and patrimonial values².

In fact, the lack of guidelines, for want of certainties, is all the more problematic in what can be regarded as a post-modern context of our civilisation, since it is vital for people involved in heritage conservation not to act according to a pervasive relativism serving the interests of speculators ready to turn the planet into a huge theme park.

It is probably to avoid this cynicism, reinforced by the tourist industry, an important pillar of late capitalism, that Wim Denslagen in his brilliant essay entitled *Romantic Modernism*

writes the history of authenticity from the Antiquity to the present day and shows that “only material substance has been accepted as authentic” in a coherent way ever since Thucydides (Denslagen 2009, pg. 107). He therefore sometimes seems to fall into a sort of manichaeism, confronting Ruskin’s allies to those, probably less present in patrimonial organisations, of Viollet-le-Duc, in other words the most radically opposing parties in the field of conservation-restoration. Yet when he sides with the former against the latter, it seems to us that his position is less committed than it appears to be. Indeed, if we are aware that Ruskin’s stance is *logically* right (if I do not intervene, I cannot be wrong) and *metaphysically* right (the first lesson of philosophy is that man must accept his lot as a mortal, finite being), it nevertheless does not appear to us as *anthropologically* right. Together with François Hartog, we are aware today that man’s experiences of time are multiple and depend on regimes of historicity throughout history. The Western man of the Middle Ages does not relate the present to the past and to the future in the same way as the post-1789 Revolution man would do. Furthermore, according to the historian, due to the rise of what he names “presentism”, the contemporary experience of a present doubly indebted towards the past and the future could mark a shift to a new regime of historicity, whose leading actors we would be (Hartog, 2003). In accordance with this principle of discontinuity, Lucie K. Morisset talks of regimes of authenticity to illustrate the idea that “to a given era corresponds a patrimonial investment” (Morisset 2009, pg. 24). Knowing there is no universal solution, and in order to serve the current “patrimonial investment” as well as possible, we try to provide students in architecture with useful tools so they can make well-argued and philosophically or politically committed decisions. We therefore think that Wim Denslagen is too radical when he claims that Nicole Ex (Ex 1993) makes things more complicated than they should be when she tries to identify other modalities of authenticity than material (conceptual, functional, historical, a-historical) (Denslagen 2009, pg. 107). It seems to us that any effort of clarification is justified and involves distinguishing between the reality levels taken into account in a logic of authenticity. Indeed, using the concept as one and absolute has led to confusion. We think that in lack of Truth with a capital T one should rationally favour operating truths (which Françoise Choay calls for). Together with Riegl, we think that things are complex, yet that solutions can be found and that, as it is the case for values like age-value and present-day value, deciding to intervene always means taking some options at the expense of others. The same applies to authenticity.

Therefore, to move away from the rhetorics of authenticity and adopt a self-conscious pragmatic approach, we have chosen to contribute to the debate in a conservation workshop and starting from the findings of analytical philosophy—whose very aim is to clarify concepts. At the International Workshop on Conservation / Transformation organised by ENHSA-EAAE (Dublin, September 2009), we had already considered the usefulness of starting from the writings of philosophers and logicians to justify interventions based on three types of identity – and of course authenticity calls upon this basic notion (Dawans ; Houbart, in press): (i) *numerical identity*, which defines the relation of an individual to him/herself along their whole career ($A=A$ or Socrates equals Socrates from birth to death); (ii) *qualitative identity*, which refers to a likeliness (with various degrees of resemblance) between one or more individuals ($A=B$ or a bald man equals another bald man if baldness is the required feature for casting extras) and finally (iii) *sortal identity*, which brings together under a same category of sort or gender numerically different individuals ($A=B$ or Socrates equals you who are reading this article, as you are both human beings)³. If natural language defines those realities as “the same” (sameness), confusions can be avoided thanks to distinctions used by logicians to refer to an object’s authenticity (which must necessarily be the same, but according to which type?). Of course, numerical identity remains an ideal for restorers. However, since qualitative identity extended to replica (or duplication) can fulfil its aesthetic role or act as a sign conveying a message, some will agree that formal authenticity (if only as a stopgap) should not be as easily rejected as a disciple of Ruskin would do. In this “semiotic” logic, Umberto Eco even states that

The taste for authenticity at all costs is the ideological product of a mercantile society, and when the reproduction of a sculpture is absolutely perfect, the privilege granted to the original is similar to the privilege granted to the first numbered edition of a book rather than to its second edition: it matters to the antique dealer, not to the literary critic (Eco 1992, pg. 16).

Even if we cannot completely agree with this statement, we think however that numerical identity (material authenticity) should not make us overlook the fact that an object can remain the same, or even authentic, even if the original material has finally disappeared a little, or a lot, or even completely. This daring assertion is supported, as we will see further, by renowned logicians as well as ancient and present-day philosophers, which makes the debate all the more fascinating. Among the audacious choices justified by sortal identity, we



Fig 1.

Fig 1. St. Bartholomew Collegiate Church, Liège (CH).

cannot ignore the case of the “free restoration”⁴ of the St. Bartholomew Collegiate Church in Liège, as it was carried out by our colleague Paul Hautecler. As the numerical identity of the original Romanesque monument had been altered by successive transformations and in the light of poor material authenticity—most stones have been replaced over time—it was decided, in order to deal with technical problems caused by wear and tear as well as to restore historical coherence to the edifice, to bet on sortal identity and restore the church as a typical example of its architectural category, in analogy with a series of Germanic churches of the rheno-mosan group⁵.

However, the debate is not closed with the various kinds of identity. Philosophy offers other tools to tackle the difficult issues of heritage policy. Indeed, logicians as David Wiggins (1971) and Theodore Scaletas have shown interest in matters of identity and spatio-temporal continuity and expressed interesting views for the architect who sometimes found himself isolated when expected to take a stand in puzzling situations similar to that of the famous ship of Theseus. In a ground-breaking article where he tackles the kind of brain teaser that logicians are fond of, Theodore Scaletas (1981) invites us to think about the conditions that allow a spatio-temporal continuity, and he offers interesting prospects to deal with restoration cases involving problems of authenticity, e.g. certain monuments whose material has been gradually replaced, or restorations through anastylosis where, even if most of the material is original, temporal continuity was interrupted sometimes over a long period of time. As mentioned earlier, the West cannot easily do away with the issue of authenticity of the material, as the recent publication by Wim Denslagen shows, where he clearly expresses his views in accordance with Ruskin’s “hands off” theories (Denslagen 2009). Yet an idea by Paul Ricoeur casts a new light on these views. Indeed, as he reflects on this logic of temporality involved in issues of identity (meant as ‘sameness’ as well as ‘selfhood’), the French philosopher, who never hesitated to open a debate between continental philosophy and analytical philosophy, re-activates ideas that have always appeared as daring. After Locke and Hume, with whom he has a heated discussion in *Oneself as Another*, he insists that identity over time implies “a principle of permanence in time” and adds that “it will be, for example, the invariable structure of a tool whose pieces will have been gradually replaced.” The principle that guarantees permanence is then defined as “the organisation of a combinatory system” (Ricoeur 1990, pg. 142). This is interpreted by Robert Russell as evidence that “the powerful abstracting tendencies of modernism are undiminished, as the allure of the ‘authentic.’” And he sees there a sort of “post-modern de-

light” similar to what happens with the “conundrum of the grandfather’s pocket knife” summarised as follows: “My father gave me his father’s pocket knife. My grandfather had replaced the blade before giving it to my father. My father replaced the handle. I have my grandfather’s pocket knife. It is authentic” (Russell 2008, pg. 105).

Nevertheless, if he remains careful about his own opinion regarding this particular example which seems to characterise the *ethos* of the modern man – evidence of a shift to a new regime of authenticity? –, Robert Russell acknowledges this kind of recognition of the authentic based on Aristotle’s distinction between memory and recollection, the latter being defined in contrast with the former as a “conscious action.” He therefore does not hesitate to conclude that “the recollection of grandfather’s knife, with all its ancillary aspects of settings and personality confirms its authenticity, despite the literal replacement of all its original parts” (Russell, pg. 105). We can find here reasons to re-open the discussion on authenticity and revise some of our categories.

If the question of temporality casts a new light on matters of identity, it also forces logicians to relinquish the formalism of their equations to take into account almost psychological considerations. Indeed, in an example mentioned in *Identity, Origin and spatiotemporal continuity*, Scaltsas considers criteria which no longer have anything to do with mathematics: for example, he confronts the identical reconstruction (starting from the same material) of a pile of cubes built by a child and conserved for two years in a corner of the room. The logician considers the case where the child rebuilds it identically following an accident; he then considers the case where the child’s mother does the same, to end with the case where the pile is deliberately destroyed then rebuilt identically by the jealous younger brother. His deduction is that in the first two cases the construction is the same (despite the different origin, which in this case is not essential, according to Scaltsas, to the object’s identity). In the third case, his deduction is that the pile is simply different despite identical material and shape—because the intention is not the same (Scaltsas 1981, pg. 398).

This notion of intention, with clearly psychological connotations, also appears in the scientific literature produced by other logicians. Indeed, according to Pascal Engel and Frédéric Nef (1988, pg. 476), it also the intention (compared with the function) that distinguishes the ship of Theseus that has been gradually rebuilt and that can sail across the seas from the ship of Theseus that has been rebuilt with old boards and that cannot function as a ship. The former will have the preference of a ship-owner, the latter that of a priest wishing to keep it as

a relic. This shows that, far from abstract and rigid solutions, the philosophy of logic opens up interesting prospects to the conservation expert who must intervene on a building. Like the architect, the logician obviously agrees to take into account some anthropological aspects and so proves those right who, like Di Stefano, claim that a rigorous value judgment must take into account historical and aesthetic circumstances, but also psychological ones; monuments must be seen as “both the work of art (in its aesthetic and historical bipolarity) and what is not the work of art, but rather a human production able to convey emotions of the mind” (Di Stefano 1994, pg. 128). Besides, similar factors bring us to consider with a generally different degree of liking an immediate post-war reconstruction and a reconstruction that would take place many years later in a completely different political context. This also has to do with the intention. But, as Paolo Marconi reports, the renowned psychoanalyst Mélanie Klein proves Scaltsas right when she justifies identical reconstruction by the mother in the above-mentioned example. It is all about repairing what is experienced as a trauma, repairing a destruction regarded as unacceptable and unfair (Marconi 2007).

This short inventory of interesting tools would not be complete without mentioning the original way in which the American philosopher and logician Nelson Goodman (1976) has theorised the question of authenticity within the framework of an ontology of art. According to him, sculpture and painting cannot be counterfeited, as these arts are *autographical* (we must look at the original, from the hand of the artist), whereas for literature and music (*allographic* arts) the difference between the original and the counterfeited copy is not significant: we need not read the manuscripts by Proust and it makes no difference whether we read *Remembrance of Things Past* in the first numbered edition or in the latest paperback edition on recycled paper, it is the same work if the text is faithful.

Starting from this theory, the peculiarity of architecture seems again to appear more clearly. It was known as the most material of arts, ontologically heavy in the eyes of Hegel. It was known as interested by nature, as it is an applied art, at equal distance between art and utilitarian object, therefore far away from Kant’s aesthetic ideal. Here it is now caught between two wheels of Goodman’s system of authenticity. This makes it necessary for us once again to analyse the case and to make a proposal according to the parameters. If we are dealing with a programmatic work whose “script” is very meticulous, it can probably be considered as allographic. This would apply to Mies Van der Rohe’s pavilion rebuilt in Barcelona in the 1980s⁶. It would also apply to the Philips pavilion designed by



Fig 2.



Fig 3.

Fig 2. Mies van der Rohe, German Pavilion, Barcelona (CH).

Le Corbusier, of which we can easily imagine that it might be entirely rebuilt, as this prototype is based on a complex geometry and on an artistic and playful intention and therefore seems to be meant for duplication, as a type. On the contrary, if we are dealing with a work whose sculptural aspects are essential and where the artist's hand seems to have mattered, things will be different. The matter will need to be reconsidered starting from the sculpture: to take extreme examples, can we imagine rebuilding Postman Cheval's ideal palace or the house of André Bloc?

To conclude this paper, we will be satisfied to mention that its only ambition was to show how interdisciplinary work can cast a new light on the conservator's practice as well as the philosopher's. Starting in the workshop and in front of practical cases, it is in the architect's best interest to become familiar with arguing in front of a demanding audience in a terribly complex context, that of a regime of historicity and authenticity which makes us particularly sensitive to our relationship with memory, in an economic context that encourages development through the museumification of cities. The philosopher cannot withdraw himself from the world. Today he must respond to this call to think together. Above all, he must learn to relate his thinking to the real world. As the relationship is symmetrical and reciprocal, we can hope for truly interdisciplinary work. It will be fully realised when we have managed to make architecture students and philosophy students collaborate in post-graduate workshops.

Fig.3. Ferdinand Cheval, Palais idéal, Hauterives (CH).

Notes

¹ On this question see Larsen and Marstein (1994) and Larsen (1995)

² A synthesis of the current debate has been made by Marino (2006, pgg. 265-335). You will also find other publications in the list of references

³ We translate here the crystal-clear definitions of Stéphane Ferret (1996, pg. 15).

⁴ This expression is used by Etienne Souriau to refer to restorations that allow innovation and interpretation (Souriau 1990, pg. 1224)

⁵ The architect Paul Hautecler explains the project in relation to the preliminary studies in Hautecler (2001)

⁶ On this reconstruction, see De Solà-Morales, Cirici and Ramos (1992) and for the application of the Goodman theory on this particular case Werning (2007)

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