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Teorie, orientamenti, indirizzi metodologici e casi studio per la conservazione e la valorizzazione del patrimonio storico-architettonico, archeologico e paesaggistico. Studi, progetti, best practices per il recupero e riqualificazione del costruito e dell'ambiente urbano.

SEZIONE 2



LEARNING FROM THE EXCEPTION: RESTORATION THEORY REVISITED THROUGH PRACTICE

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Abstract: Today, restoration is confronted with a wide array of complex challenges, ranging from climate change and mass tourism to the pressing questions raised by the adoption of increasingly sophisticated technologies. Yet, amid these ever-evolving scenarios, an epistemological issue – seemingly elementary, even clichéd – remains unresolved: the relationship between theoretical reflection and on-site practice. In the face of the appeal of diagnostic tools and the seemingly straightforward solutions put forward by the latest advancements in so-called ‘green’ chemistry, critical frameworks appear increasingly weakened, often relegated to a sphere of restoration that few scholars are willing to engage with today, due to its inherently problematic nature.

Keywords: Preservation, Theory, Conservation, Heritage, Restoration Site.

1. Introduction

A restoration project needs to address the complexity of phenomena, with all the particularities which each field of interest entails. This means keeping a uniform vision of the different problems analyzed in specialized and multi-disciplinary approaches, while integrating the different fields of knowledge with an in-depth examination in order to guarantee the greatest conservation of the single asset with the minimum intervention. To combine the totality of our analytical knowledge in order to bring about the inter-reaction of disciplines and ways of thinking which are often so different presupposes a culture that contradicts the uncritical recourse to text-book formulas, but is able to re-elaborate principals, rules, and experience in the light of differing doctrines. Much has been said about the critical formulation of a restoration project since restoration is above all a critical act and as such, especially today, in the face of global phenomena becoming ever more complex there is a need to recuperate the theoretical and notional values of the discipline [1].

2. The Limits of Labels in Restoration

Professional and institutional practices have shown the limitation of categories of judgment and intervention, such as critical restoration, conservative and stylistic restoration, terms linked to the long disciplinary debate and its proximity to artistic historiography. The more one widens the field of action, from the single building to a landscape, the greater the increase in complexity and, consequently, the necessity to combine different fields of knowledge and disciplines. And not only this; striving for unity amidst multiplicity demands a continuous reorganization, modification and redirection of knowledge during the project process. This is why the restorer, when drawing up the restoration project, must walk a tightrope and, balancing history and first-hand knowledge, move among many fields, between the multitude of disciplines that make up the final result, i.e. a ‘good restoration work’ [2].

To restore certainly does not mean to re-write, but to enter into the culture of the object in order to understand the aspects that lie behind a particular text, to read and knowingly conserve the material stratifications. Today the discipline has adopted the idea that a project is founded on the awareness and reading of what exists, a complex process which does not correspond to mere acceptance of material documents or immutable significance [3]. It is the dynamic acquisition of information that interfaces

with the designer, with his culture, where the same information is enriched and gives rise to a continuous flow of the interpretation of all new facts as they are acquired. An asset changes and develops layers in the long processes involving different uses, readings and interpretations. Moreover, it is useful to understand that before any intervention is carried out one must know how to look and read, in order to tiptoe forward, guided by a sense of humility towards the work. The exercise of reading makes use of all the analytical and interdisciplinary knowledge about which much has been written, and this approach is accepted and generally known among the scientific community. However, a multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary approach often seems to emerge, which involves different specialisations and different operators who are rarely able to manage the complexity of the work and construct a dialogue among themselves. An interdisciplinary approach was employed in the development of monitoring tools for the Risorgimento sculptural groups in the city of Florence. This methodology combined detailed knowledge of individual artworks, obtained through traditional archival research, with a comprehensive diagnostic campaign that effectively addressed the limitations of conventional research methods [4].

3. In the ongoing search for restoration principles and practices

Such complexity is almost always attributed to a work which is intended to be unique, leaving out any form of possible comparison. We discuss theories, points of view, and tools, but how similar problems have been faced in similar works – according to type, chronology, characters, materials – is almost never discussed. Even this contribution can do no more than trace some technical and critical orientations by closely examining a series of project and on-site restoration experiences. A choice almost imposed by the substantial literature that developed over the last twenty years of the twentieth century. A difficult relationship that helps to explain literature's fortune in recent years regarding the pivotal elements of knowledge, diagnostics and design, always traced back to the specificity, if not the uniqueness, of individual cases. This comparison on the one hand sees an increase in diagnostic tools and advanced technologies increasingly focused on the search for solutions that are also compatible with sustainability, which in restoration should have its own specificity.

On the other hand there is a weakening of cultural debate and critical stances. While the lively discussion between disciplines and the many theoretical formulations that have all come together in a well-established literature has not been able to produce standards and regulations for restoration practice, it has undoubtedly contributed to the improvement and consolidation of terms and procedures. Although the issue of the language of restoration, as we will see also in this work, is very complex and not yet entirely resolved [5].

With the new laws, now shared by the European community, a new awareness is spreading today: it is crucial to recognize the importance of knowing how to manage the heritage so that the present becomes a memory not only to be safeguarded but also capable of building the very basis of the differences that feed the wealth of disputes and contemporary policies.

Even the measures of diversity that time stratifies in architecture, more and better than in any other human document, contribute to enrich the dialectic. A dialectic between 'history' as an interrogation of the sources on which the restoration operates and 'presentism' which the enhancement, not only of tourism, increasingly imposes on those involved in conservation, which today increasingly leads a profession that has always been affected by disputes and conflicts [7].

4. The dispute between the document and the proof

The insistent call for rigor in the preliminary analyses and studies of the building materials, also in relation to the 'test of time' and to the sometimes disastrous results derived from the use of innovative materials and techniques that are not always adequately checked, is not only a call to the philologie als philosophie which restoration must assume as the basis of its interventions if it wishes to be scientifically credible. In this sense the 'proof', the foundation of all scientific research, assumes its own specific meaning in the language of the restorer [8]. The knowledge must be the result of a series of inspections of documents and conducted in situ, but also obtained by gathering data from laboratory tests and analyses, drawing on and bringing the culture of the survey, which has its own complex roots, back to the practice of restoration. Restoration therefore presents itself as an act of ongoing, continued and continuous fact-finding achieved by recording the execution of the work with philological precision, and the



Fig. 2 - Florence, Monument to Manfredo Fanti, geometric and dimensional data representation, photoplan and deterioration analysis (Graphic processing by P. Bordoni, A.L. Petracci).

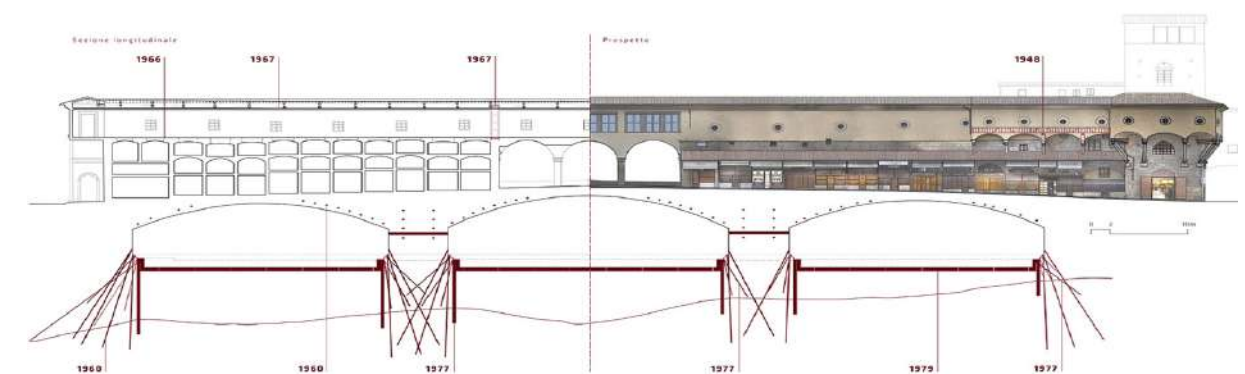


Fig. 3 - Florence, Vasari Corridor and Ponte Vecchio (Graphic processing by F. Massi, C. Monci).

critical gathering of the data necessary to produce documentation that is complete and that can be used to monitor and control the work once it has been carried out. This is the approach adopted in defining the monitoring tools, such as the development of a system for recording restoration interventions during the on-site restoration phase, linked to a database, developed by the Department of Architecture at the University of Florence to provide scientific support for the restoration of the Vasari Corridor at the Uffizi [9]. The work becomes a document of itself, almost a critical re-edition of the material phenomenon that is investigated. It becomes a document that orders the other sources and archives, indeed the work is often the first archive that structures the external materials, ending up questioning what it is evidence of for those conducting the restoration.

The object to be restored is therefore a document that leaves clues (physical and paper) and it is the narration that hypothesizes an order, which by incorporating time problematizes the origin and opens up a story which is based on a concept of document and multiple proofs.

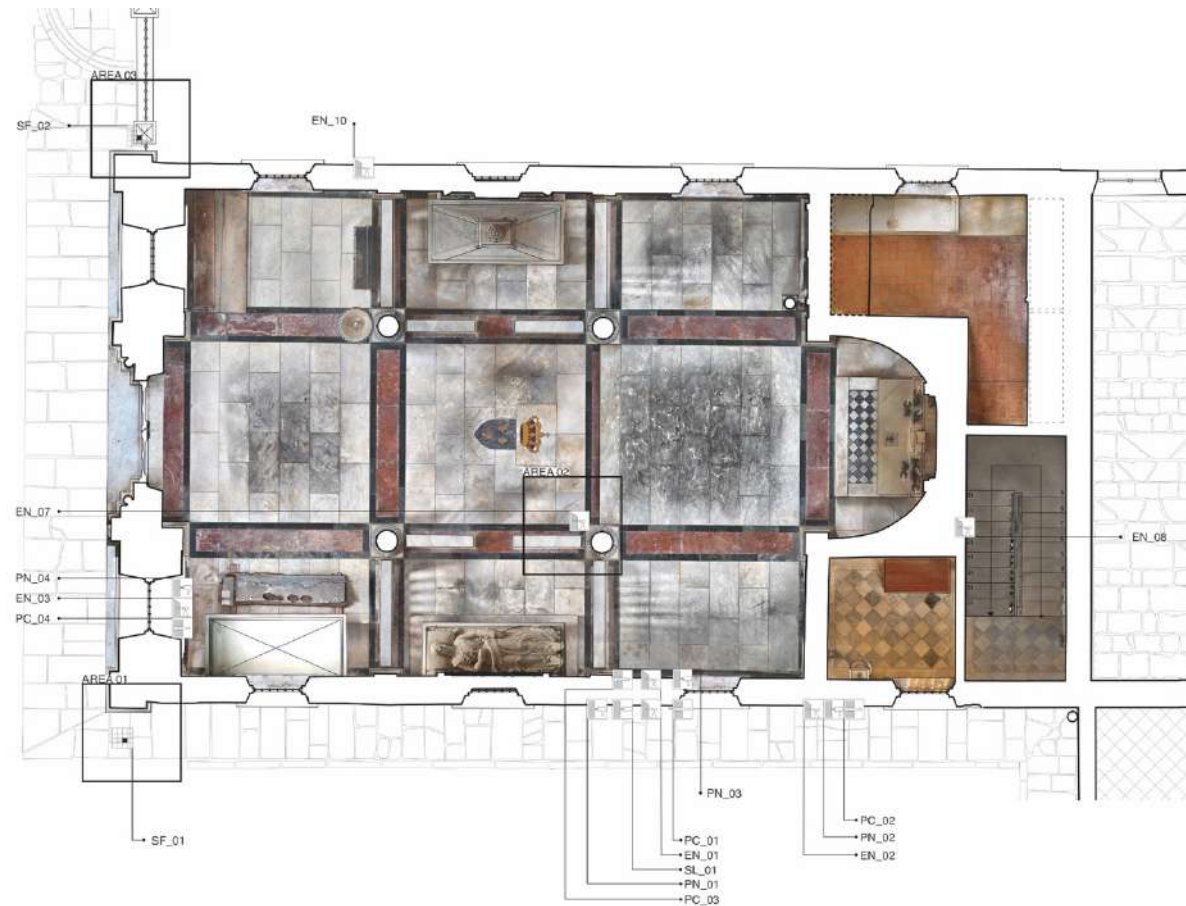
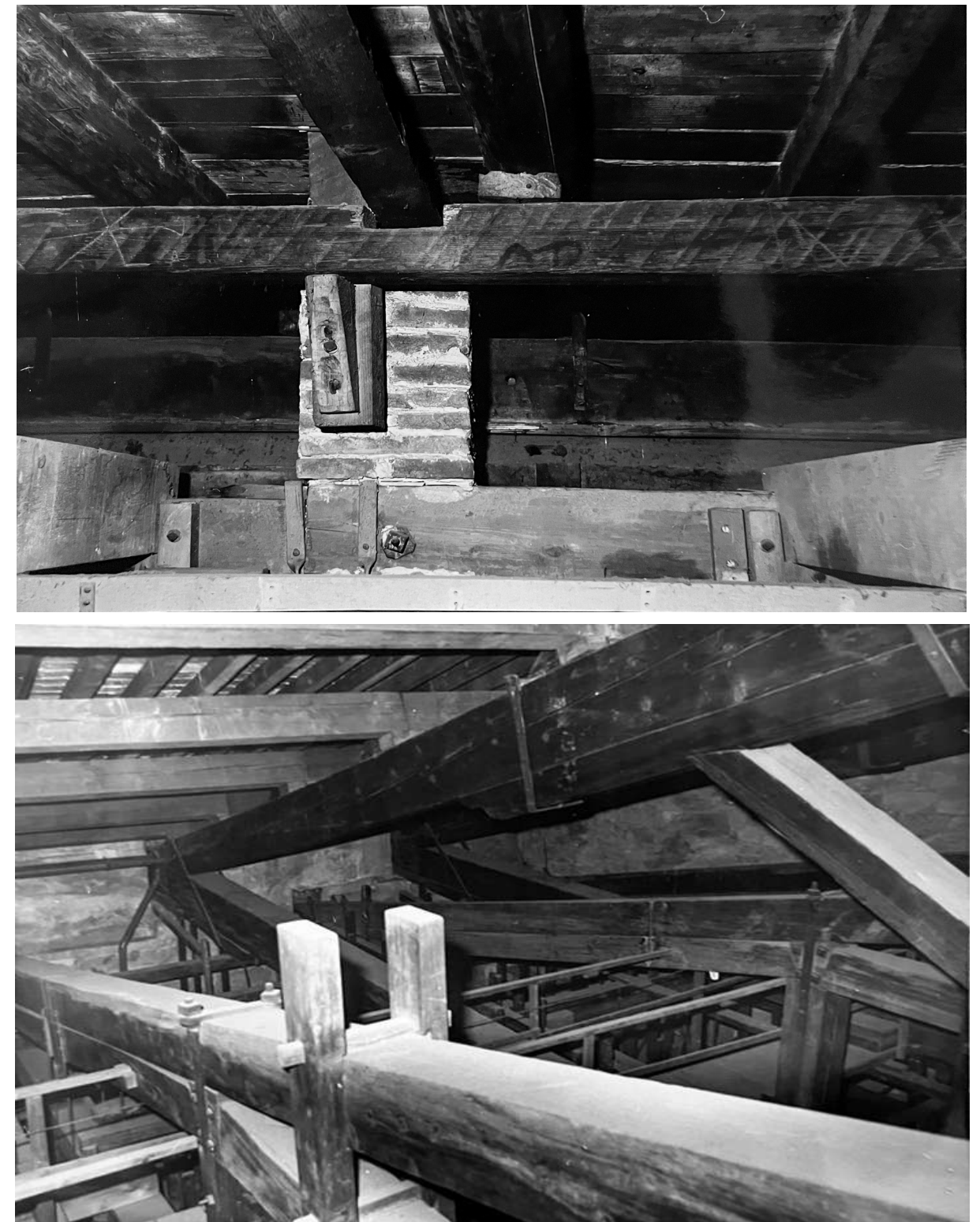


Fig. 4 - Viareggio, Villa Borbone, mausoleum, diagnostic plan (Graphic processing by P. Lagani).

Restoration has always been measured with the problem of the fake, false and true and it turns out to be an extreme form of a way to 'plagiarize' the original. However, if the work can be considered a text, and restoration a form of intertextuality, then plagiarism must be historicized and ethically and aesthetically be a form of the same intertextuality [10].

5. Cognitive process, the temporalities and sources

This is certainly not the place to discuss or even less so to trivialise these fundamentals of restoration literature. However, at least one observation should be made. The procedural process described in the majority of these texts, and which defines an incipit of the restoration phases, contributes to defining the 'knowledge project', of which the historical-critical research takes on the value of real structural framework. The knowledge project remains a cognitive process and the temporalities, which the history can help to identify, can or perhaps are often interpreted in a conflictual way [11]. The knowledge project is not a neutral act and cannot be separated from the restorer's point of view. The knowledge project has now lost its role as a 'preliminary moment' to be extended throughout the process. But now it is more fundamental than ever to combine reflection on knowledge with that of recognition. All forms of recognition are based on the critical assumption of documents and sources, and the problem that should be underlined is a discussion about the sources which today not only calls into question the statute – a discussion which has been going on for more than fifty years – but the constitution itself as a structure of information. Leaving aside the non-systematicity, the non-representation of a world, and a much closer relationship with the context than is often thought, whether it be social or environmental, the point is that the sources are increasingly viewed as a 'jurisdictional product' and as such the result of an intention or a conflict [12]. This concept presents the restorer with many new problems because measuring oneself against an intention or jurisdiction no longer gives the historical work the guise of a premise or legitimization but the much more difficult one of constituting the fundamental subject in a restoration project. The trace document and the source document, even more so in a digitalised society, do not pose in-



Figs. 5-6 - Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, details of the wooden structure supporting the roof of the Salone dei Cinquecento, photographic survey of March 18, 1988 (Archivio Corrente – Ufficio Belle Arti, Faldone 34/1).

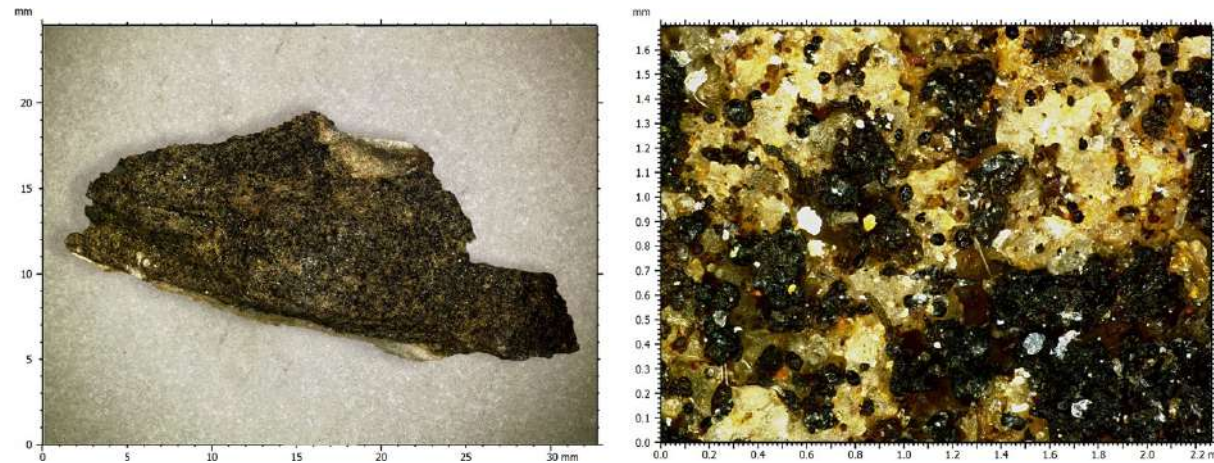


Fig. 7 - Mortar sample from the Roman amphitheatre of the Archaeological Park of Neapolis in Syracuse analyzed under a digital microscope at different magnification factors (Acquisitions by P. Lagani).

stitutional problems only for history (of any period and subject), but also for a practice that sees the knowledge project as a very uncomfortable companion of the redefinition of what is an event, which the restorer practices every day on site. Restoration is also measured against another scientific bedrock, now the subject of intense re-examination: the sources. The problem of how sources are considered and of their opaque and non-transparent nature is perhaps even more evident today for restoration and for its history. The need to consider sources as a repository of information and to ask ‘who’ produces them (both written and built) and who conserves and orders them and why, stems from the need to reconstruct a less linear rationality than the one that is still partly late positivist today. Restoration must know how to question the sources, rather than requiring them to approve operational choices.

5. Conclusions

Those who begin to work on a project cannot disregard the experience acquired, codified and discussed at least throughout modernity and which have become symbols and signs, making the restorer’s work more complex. Every work of art is in itself ‘unique and unrepeatable’ (an exception) and imbued with a uniqueness and peculiarity that renders it different from others, but even if only to avoid turning this statement into an obstacle it is possible, and perhaps necessary, on the one hand, to be able to reread the various declinations of the symbols incorporated in the work and on the other to translate the experience into models that are at least repeatable. The comparison and critical knowledge of the body of case studies of similar, comparable interventions, and the comparison with the practices and results of others, following a method which once again is very close to medicine and the cognitive sciences, become fundamental elements for the restoration in identifying a path that does not oppose the uniqueness of experience and the abstraction of models and theories.

In fact it is the acceptance of an unbroken line between theoretical reflection and experience, the recognition that every stage of a restoration project needs a continuous *epoché*, in order not to outline a rigid and objective course of action but a series of flexible and implementable stages which must be enriched by the continuing evolution of the academic debate as well as on site experience [14].

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