



MEMORY, BEAUTY AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

Reflections on the topicality
of Roberto Pane

Anna Anzani
Eugenio Guglielmi
editors

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In memory of Piera and Arturo

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FOREWORD

Roberto Pane and his lesson

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The approach proposed by this volume emphasizes on the contemporary value of the relationship between design and preservation, highlighting, through the many contributions, the open view of a great interpreter of twentieth-century Italian design culture and his profound capacity for intellectual vision. To us observers of the neo-third millennium, Pane proposes a very articulate point of view on design, given his truly original ability to address the peculiar theme of architectural preservation with an extraordinarily rich and innovative perspective. In fact, already in the middle of the last century, he introduced the psychological value of the connection to memory and the recognition and necessity of preserving beauty, as indispensable aspects to the enjoyment of spaces shaped by man, in time and history. Through care and intelligent preservation, places can become inexhaustible sources of perceived well-being that undoubtedly transcends function, whether merely monumental or jointly practical. For those who develop research and design for urban spaces in great transformation - in the midst of the postmodern era and in the context of the so-called information society - these logics today are vital and, if well conceived, are capable of activating a virtuous circle between memory, territory, design, use and value which allows us to restore to places that sense of common good too often lost and the virtue of being truly hospitable to all.

Looking at the immense work of Pane as an intellectual and designer, and selecting only a few areas that I consider closer and most exemplary for us - from his meeting with Benedetto Croce in the 1940s, to his call to UNESCO in 1949 as an expert in architectural preservation; from the drafting of the *International Charter of Preservation of Venice* in 1964 (an ideal continuity of the 1931 *Athens Charter*) to which he collaborated among others to codify common guidelines after the hectic post-war reconstruction, to his membership in *Italia Nostra* in 1956; from his critical participation in Adriano Olivetti's Community Movement in 1958, to the 1977 Territorial and Landscape Plan of the Amalfi Coast, to his many university teaching assignments at home and abroad - we can see a rare ability to be within or even to anticipate dynamics of innovation that truly transcended his time.

He vigorously led environmental battles, against building speculation and the unrestrained cementing of the territory, promoting, on the contrary, its respect and reserving a central space in his work for ecological issues; he favoured the extension of the concept of "architectural literature" to the discipline of preservation, importing the categories of "poetry" and "literature" - mediated by the intellectual and friend Croce - introducing the value of the creative component of preservation, an approach capable of expressing a selective and therefore critical principle to the work of preservation itself.

For us, who operate in the field of spatial design for the diffuse and becoming city, it is

interesting to read about the debate he promoted against the inalterability of the theoretical city, moving, on the contrary, in favour of urban stratification and, as mentioned above, of the critical approach to preservation in architecture - of which he became, with Cesare Brandi, one of the main exponents - adopting and teaching the criterion of the "case-by-case" study and the value of the creative act of the designer.

Pane also vigorously defended architectural and landscape chorality, recognizing a continuous synergy between the architectural or artistic works and the environment for which the works themselves were conceived, thus placing the issue of preservation in a concretely broader spatial and relational sphere. He also emphasised on the need to attribute "new function" to the restored artifact through particular interventions, in fact suggesting that this became the first real form of conservation: by encouraging a virtuous as well as alternative use of the work, its further decline is averted.

Such logics bring Pane's transdisciplinary culture closer to the interpretation that the School of Design of the Politecnico di Milano, with the Degree Course in Interior Design and the Master's Degree in Interior and Spatial Design, has been able to develop over the years - consistent with the development of an increasingly dynamic, expanded, connected and diffuse society - where the value of interior space design has extended to a very broad and nuanced domain. Placing human beings and their behaviours at the centre of design - with the attention to psychological value that Pane has originally valued through his many studies and projects - we tend to give meaning and significance to an important relational system that activates various scales of enjoyment of places, from the purely visual and perceptual one in the monumental landscape context, to that connected to dissemination and cultural information, to that related to leisure and/or operational spaces, to the use more exquisitely related to entertainment and spectacle, in a broad category of user involvement, between the "restored" work, the users themselves and the "new functions."

In fact, the theme I call the new *spolia* (1) - that is, the entirely contemporary value of reinterpreting stratification and ruin in the growing, changing, and renewing city - is a central subject in the debate of the Course of Studies in Interior Design. For years, with its faculty and students, it has been researching and dealing with the issue of urban residual spaces, leftovers, and the logics of re-functionalization and valorisation of those places, sometimes even historical ones, that are progressively converted through criteria of updating, initially spontaneous or guided by strategies of social innovation. Criteria that strongly take into account innumerable approaches, including the cultural and creative relationship between ruin and intervention, between the value of preservation and the

strategy promoted by “design actions”; or the dense dialogue that can take place between historical and contemporary languages; or even the sense of preserving the beautiful and the worn, as a plot from which unique semantic and symbolic values can be extracted, often rooted and originally proper to a urban fabric, to make them emerge as key elements for the interpretation and use of the urban space rediscovered and made available to all.

Quotation, allusion and other forms of what we might call a kind of “intertextuality” now measure the link with contemporaries and predecessors, reinterpreting evidence through its placement in a new semantic, literary or artistic, and thus visual as well as critical space. In fact, similar is also the operation of critics, which has constructed and continues to develop different readings and interpretations, contextualizing past documents and remains within different evaluative hypotheses. The concept of *spolia* encompasses several aspects and potentials for the action of spatial design and preservation: that of being a historical document, that of representing works born out of the tradition/innovation process, and that of being substance for contemporary critical reflection.

Then - by extension of scope - we can think of how central, in our time and in our research, is the valorisation, through their recovery, and in some cases the actual “critical preservation,” of the great cathedrals of industrial archaeology or of powerful abandoned urban infrastructures (2) (returned to the community thanks to projects that gave them an unusual landscape and/or functional role), but also to the repurposing of churches (3) and archaeological remains (today often poorly or not at all valued) into places that host shows, performances or activities related to education and culture (4). We can also think of original languages derived from different cultural identities stratified over time that overlap and confront each other in increasingly promiscuous places; and also of the use of lights, scenic effects and “sensitive” environments (5) - by artists, designers and light-designers - that characterize with their design quality the monuments and historic centres of many contemporary European cities (6).

Therefore, in the third millennium, the theme of preservation and memory conservation expands its field of intervention by shifting from historical vestiges to those of mid-contemporaneity, from places once designed for the celebration of worship or civic or infrastructural actions (think of the many Roman aqueducts, bridges and roads), to places originally conceived in the 19th and 20th centuries for the expression of industrial work with its disused operating plants (7), and to the great disused infrastructural systems of the 20th century, which now constitute a very powerful network of cultural and landscape connections in the diffuse territory.

In fact, in front of the formation of a new “intermediate landscape”

between city and countryside, which is currently proposed as a “total landscape” (Piccinno, 2012, 62) - in which elements belonging to the two environments increasingly overlap and replace one another - even the concepts of “centre” and “periphery”, which are very much grounded in the European architectural and urban planning culture, tend to equate and exchange. In this scenario, the meaning of restoration and preservation must update itself regarding the value of what is worth preserving and maintaining in a tradition of contemporary cultural-historical disclosure and proper reuse toward new needs.

In this sense, the “new cultural geography” that developed at the turn of the second and third millennia can now become an aid to interpret this new landscape, which is read, in a postmodernist key, as a text, a set of signs in contact with the cultural-historical context that permeates it (Dear, 2001), signs that define hypothetical traces, beyond the objectivity of vision, on which the designer can set possible design solutions, by adopting meanings already present (belonging to the historical memory of the context) and returning them with new forms of expression.

Over the past years, it has been demonstrated that the short-to-medium term action of interior and spatial design can implement effective updatable solutions at different scales, with little impact, and dialoguing with the most diverse needs of conservation and preservation in a powerful expression of languages. In fact, the more and more cultivated relationship between spatial design and the world of contemporary art as well as different performative and digital manifestations is a symptom of how expressive and engaging is the connection between memory, beauty, languages, and behaviours, in a process of increasingly close comparison and exchange between different disciplines and eras, now made easier thanks to digital systems.

Thus, proceeding by integrated project forms (among the many disciplines of design, arts, and social sciences) appears to be one of the indispensable and unavoidable conditions for achieving that “ecology” of spaces which is useful for a viable and sustainable development, already pointed out by Pane as the highroad to the environment quality. As philosopher Nicola Emery (Emery, 2007) argues, the design of urban places should always generate a device whose overall meaning must be to harmonize and care for space, preserving proportion, cohesion, equitable distance from decision-making centres, and to ensure public accessibility to what he defines as the greatest of the commons: the “space-memory-nature” as a whole (Emery, 2007, 20). Memory, which here can be understood as “multidimensional” and which, potentially, “as a social relationship, could take on the features of a laboratory, between modernity and post-modernity, that is, a highly dynamic space in which, combining

scientific research, mass and new-media, culture and society can be respectively enhanced, [...] in the hypothesis [...] that what could make the difference is precisely the ability and sensitivity to revive spaces, places and objects, in the perspective of an expressive/relational paradigm, capable of restoring the sense of a contemporaneity that is lived and not only mechanically suffered" (Germano, 2006, 167).

Paolo Rosa, founder of Studio Azzurro, in one of his important contributions in 2011 for the volume *Milano, città e spettacolo*, recalled that today "we need to appreciate anew the wonder of research, intelligence and courage [through a diffused "spectacle of research"] that no longer concerns only theatre, art, music, fashion, design, but all those border, outsider, middle manifestations that use multiple tools, that have a vocation for constituting themselves in a network, that know how to speak new languages and are attentive to the territory, to relationships and collaborations [...], that know how to intersect with the languages of innovation and how to revitalize - in light of a mutation determined by technology - even the oldest disciplines, the expressions of memory" (Calbi, 2011).

Therefore, in the field of preservation, cultural heritage enhancement and historical narration of remains, *new media* assume greater significance. Visual and representational expansions of historical areas, also through the use of *devices* that enable augmented and virtual perception of spaces, now allow a knowledge of past places in their virtual "reconstructed" original connotation. This opens the design of spaces - in relation to preservation - to intriguing new interpretations and critical areas. It would be interesting to converse with Roberto Pane about this, to confront with respect to the sense, now possible, of a virtual and more articulated philological recovery, in the vein of his research.

NOTES

- 1 *Spolia* (neuter plural nominative of *Spolium, spoli*). Literally, in the period of the Roman empire up to the late empire and the medieval period, the term denoted, in a negative sense, the set of goods that were violently taken from opponents during a conflict (spoliation, loot, robbery). The term *spolia* takes on a different, more positive meaning, from the fifth century A.D. onward, in Roman/Christian times, meaning by this term an object that can be reused and revalued. In archaeology, the term *spolia* is charged with an additional meaning and is frequently referred to "objects of reuse" (heritage inherited from the past is no longer seen as loot that the enemy has taken from the memory of posterity, but rather as evidence of a document of a past era to be used and enhanced). Today, by extension, it can be given the sense to the overlapping and integration of architectural, decorative and finishing elements from very different eras that coexist and generate a "memory stratification" that potentially

offers many opportunities for storytelling and enhancement of the space built and experienced by humans. (See Irene Tadini's Master's Thesis, *Spolia contemporanee*, supervisor Giovanna Piccinno, Politecnico di Milano, School of Design, A.Y. 2014/2015).

- 2 See the case study *High Line Park*, New York City, Linear Park, designers Studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro, landscape architecture firm James Corner Field Operations, 2002-2006/2015.
- 3 See the case studies of *Mediateca S. Teresa* in Via Moscova, Milan, housed in the seventeenth-century church of Santa Teresa, where philological preservation and the recovery of parts of the building demolished by the war, the study of the facilities and the set-up of the new library focused on information technology tools only are approached, a project by AIM (Association of Metropolitan Interests) and studio M2P Architetti Associati; *Selexyz Dominicaner Maastricht*, a church restored and recovered to the use as a Bookstore and Coffee-shop, Maastricht, a project by Merx + Girod Architecten.
- 4 Countless shows are staged in the Teatro Grande in Pompeii, in the Arena in Naples, in the Arena in Verona, at the Colosseum in Rome with digital representations designed by Piero Angela.
- 5 See the works of Studio Azzurro Produzioni Milano, including *La quarta scala. Portatori di storie*, *Ambiente sensibile*, Santa Fe (RA), International Biennale, 2008.
- 6 See the case studies of Lyon with the annual Lyon. *La Fête des Lumières* and of Turin with the annual event *Torino. Luci d'artista*.
- 7 See the case studies of *Tate Modern Gallery London*, Turbine Hall, designed by Herzog & De Meuron, 1994/95>1998/2000, former London Turbine power station turned into contemporary art gallery and event venue; *Area Falk* in Sesto San Giovanni, Milan, Masterplan project, Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2005 (now abandoned due to change of the area ownership). Renzo Piano observes, "I was fascinated by the idea of experimenting with an urban rebirth on the wrecks of disused factories, that mending that we talk so much about today [...]. A work that began fifteen years ago [...]. In that design there were all the values that have accompanied my projects for years: the green, the model school, the sick-friendly hospital, the urban park [...]. Education and health care speak a common language, they are places of culture, care and humanity, and mending is stitching up, giving back to the community an otherwise abandoned place. The Sesto area was a great opportunity". http://www.corriere.it/cronache/16_maggio_12/piano-lascio-progetto-dell-area-ex-falck-li-city-shopping-ca577924-1881-11e6-a192-aa62c89d5ec1.shtml.

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PREMISE

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Returning to the thought of Roberto Pane, almost forty years after his death, is a way to honor a figure of extraordinary intellectual and artistic stature and to repropose topics that are still inspiring in different disciplinary fields.

In post-industrial cities, the need to redefine a new balance between land use and psycho-physical well-being, to limit the consumption of soil, energy, built and natural heritage drives design research toward the reuse and regeneration of abandoned urban spaces, which are often characterized more by historical memories than by current meanings. As the traditional boundaries between interior and outdoor spaces fade in the contemporary scenario, disciplines such as architecture and interior design determine the relationship between people and places and find themselves dealing with issues such as interiority, experience, emotion and affect, lifestyles, conditions of memory, identity and heritage (1).

With the gradual broadening of its subject matter, starting with an interest in monumental buildings, the field of preservation then turned to diffuse heritage, to finally consider landscape, contemplating the whole habitat in which people experience their daily lives. Embracing the importance of psychological aspects, this widened gaze also holds anthropological significance and indicates that the interest of preservation tends to turn not only to the works, which convey historical and artistic messages, but also to the recipients of those messages, namely human beings. In a reciprocal way, psychology seems to extend its field of attention by moving beyond its traditional boundaries, corresponding to the limits of the subject, going toward urban space.

In order to integrate different fields of knowledge that are commonly separated, a transdisciplinary view seems to constitute an innovative approach that can stimulate connections and meeting places, where normally lines of exclusion have been seen, and promote greater sensitivity to urban and natural spaces. It is precisely to the concept of transdisciplinarity (2) that Giulio Pane refers in the concluding contribution of an important conference held in 2008 (3).

The purpose of this collection of contributions is to revive the valuable legacy of Roberto Pane, who was the first, with depth and foresight, to focus on issues such as the psychological and ecological instance in preservation, and reaffirmed the fundamental role of memory and beauty as necessary dimensions of individual and collective well-being. Exploring a boundary space rich with questions, seemingly distant disciplines can hopefully be brought into dialogue, interrogating creativity and calling for innovative contributions, in a dynamic dialectic between education and the profession.

The collection is divided into three sessions. The first session, *Time and Beauty* includes



contributions in which history and preservation confront aesthetic aspects, indispensable components of the conservation debate. The second session, *Psyche and Places*, includes contributions in which reflections on immaterial aspects confront the dimension of physical space. The third session, *Space and Memory*, includes contributions in which design culture, often synonymous with innovation is challenged by the theme of memory.

We consider as an important achievement having brought different disciplines to take unusual points of view, stepping out of their own boundaries and looking for reasons even in adjacent areas; we hope that this work will contribute to deepening the complementary, barrier-free role that science and art can play in a unifying dimension of knowledge.

← 0.1

Caserta countryside,
ancient farmhouse.

© Roberto Pane

Also published in: Pane,
R. (1961). *Campania, la
casa e l'albero* (Campania,
the house and the tree).
Naples: Montanino.

Roberto Pane
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Andrea Pane.

NOTES

- 1 Attiwill S. (2020). *Foreword*, in Anzani A. (ed.) *Mind and Places. A multidisciplinary Approach to the Design of Contemporary City*. Springer Series in Design and Innovation, Cham: Springer Nature, v-vi.
- 2 The term "transdisciplinarity" was introduced by Jean Piaget (1896-1980) in 1970.
- 3 Pane G. (2010). *Attualità di Roberto Pane*. In S. Casiello, A. Pane e V. Russo (ed.), *Proceedings of the Conference Roberto Pane tra storia e restauro. Architettura, città, paesaggio*, Naples, October 27-28 2008, Venice: Marsilio, 566-567.

In post-industrial cities, the need to redefine a new balance between land use and psycho-physical well-being, to limit the consumption of soil, energy, built and natural heritage drives design research toward the reuse and regeneration of abandoned urban spaces, often characterized by stratified memories. The purpose of this collection is to revive the valuable thought of Roberto Pane, who first focused on the psychological and ecological instance in preservation, reaffirming the fundamental role of memory and beauty as necessary dimensions of individual and collective well-being. From his legacy, transdisciplinary confluence of interior architecture, spatial design and behavioural neuroscience constitutes at present a powerful response to the widespread demand for organism-centred design processes and for places consistent with psychological, emotional, and social needs. The first session, *Time and Beauty*, includes contributions in which history and preservation confront aesthetic aspects, indispensable components of the preservation debate. In the second session, *Psyche and Places*, reflections on immaterial aspects confront the dimension of physical space. In the third session, *Space and Memory*, design culture, often synonymous with innovation, is challenged by the theme of memory.

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