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excerpt

CONSERVATION— CONSUMPTION

PRESERVING THE TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE VALUES

Donatella Fiorani
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Editors



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CONTENTS

IX Acknowledgments

Introduction

- 5 Conservation/Consumption. EAAE Network on Conservation, Workshop 6
Miguel Angel Calvo-Salve, Loughlin Kealy
Marywood University, Scranton (PA), USA; University College Dublin, Ireland
- 9 Compostela and the Way of St. James: a view of the World, 1300-1600
Francisco Singul
Sociedade Anónima de Xestión do Plan Xacobeo, Spain

Essays

- 31 Are we all pilgrims? The cultural heritage and sustainable tourism
Francesca Albani
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
- 39 Accessibility to cultural heritage between tangible and intangible
Alberto Arengi, Luca Baraldi, Ilaria Garofolo
*Università degli Studi di Brescia, Italy; Fondazione Itinera, Modena, Italy;
Università degli Studi di Trieste, Italy*
- 45 Walking through the cultural landscape: from the pilgrimages to the conquest of
the 'cathedrals of the earth'
Carla Bartolomucci
Università degli Studi dell'Aquila, Italy
- 59 Confluence of tangible and intangible heritage: the case of El Camino de Santiago
Miguel Angel Calvo-Salve
Marywood University, Scranton (PA), USA
- 73 Sowing the seeds of awareness to defend cultural heritage
Giuliana Cardani
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
- 85 Road travellers and pilgrims in Abruzzo. Ancient and modern routes between
oblivion, resistance and consumption
Simonetta Ciranna
Università degli Studi dell'Aquila, Italy

- 97 Preservation in the era of Tourist Pressure. From the Way of St. James to the Rialto Bridge area in Venice: some thoughts on unsustainable consumption of heritage
Sara Di Resta
Università IUAV di Venezia, Italy
- 109 A reflection on meaning and continuity in the conservation of pilgrimage routes
Fintan Duffy
Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland
- 121 Tangible and intangible in conservation: friends, false friends or aliens? Some considerations on the Camino de Santiago as cultural heritage
Donatella Fiorani
"Sapienza" Università di Roma, Italy
- 133 *I Cammini d'Italia*: Italy's routes. Local enhancement strategies
Giovanna Franco
Università degli Studi di Genova, Italy
- 141 Authentic, tangible, intangible: tourist vs. heritage? Reflections on the impacts of tourism on the conservation of sites
Mariacristina Giambruno
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
- 151 Sensing Places. Walking along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela
Caterina Giannattasio
Università degli Studi di Cagliari, Italy
- 161 Conservation and cultural tourism: conflicts and solutions
Marion Harney
University of Bath, United Kingdom
- 173 The walnut and the well. A reflection about inheritance and pilgrimage
Loughlin Kealy
University College Dublin, Ireland
- 185 "Se Venezia muore": is restricted access a feasible solution for excess tourism?
Giulio Mirabella Roberti
Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Italy
- 193 The construction of cultural heritage discourse in the present: reflections starting from World Heritage site Camino de Santiago de Compostela
Lucina Napoleone
Università degli Studi di Genova, Italy
- 203 Ethics of consumption of cultural heritage in the age of low cost tourism
Annunziata Maria Oteri
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
- 215 The accessibility of monuments on the Camino: the Roman wall of Lugo as exemplar
Antonio Pernas Varela
CESUGA University College A Coruña, Spain
- 227 Declinations of the concept of authenticity
Serena Pesenti
Politecnico di Milano, Italy

- 235 Conservation of tangible and intangible heritage: a complexity to be managed in close relation with the local community
Daniela Pittaluga
Università degli Studi di Genova, Italy
- 249 An 'experiential journey' between the material and immaterial values of a territory. Is there still an alternative to trivialised tourism?
Barbara Scala
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
- 259 "Recording is not Remembering". Consumption and conservation between visual and factual experience in cultural tourism
Emanuela Sorbo
Università IUAV di Venezia, Italy
- 271 Conservation as experience
Sally Stone
Manchester School of Architecture, United Kingdom
- 279 Lost in the (cultural) supermarket: heritage, tourism and conservation practices in the post-globalised world
Nino Sulfaro
Università Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria, Italy
- 289 Intangible heritage and architectural drawings
Tomás Valente Lloves
CESUGA University College A Coruña, Spain
- 301 The immaterial inheritance of the pilgrimage routes in the Gargano area
Clara Verazzo, Mariangela Bitondi
Università degli Studi "Gabriele D'Annunzio" Chieti–Pescara, Italy
- 311 La consommation du patrimoine culturel en France: interactions entre sauvegarde et tourisme commercial. L'étude de cas du quartier du Marais a Paris
Antonella Versaci
Università degli Studi di Enna "Kore"
- 321 Oral history as a link between architecture and its sociocultural backdrop
Petr Vorlík
Czech Technical University, Czech Republic

In Conclusion

- 333 Time, space, matter. Conservation/Consumption along the Camino of Santiago de Compostela
Stefano Francesco Musso
Università degli Studi di Genova, Italy

Annexe

- 347 Reports of the working groups
- 353 List of Participants

DECLINATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY

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Introduction

In the operational activity for the preservation of existing historical heritage, the tangible elements of material testimonies (objects or buildings) are entwined with their intangible meanings.

The critical aspects of 'immaterial' attributes lie in the consequences for 'material' preservation that stem from the interpretations accorded to them. The issue revolves around the various declinations of the concept of authenticity that can be found in different cultural spheres, as witnessed through the globalised views in which we discuss restoration today. On one hand, there is the risk of distorting the meaning of the 'immaterial' testimony, consequently promoting and motivating the restoration and falsification of the surviving 'material' testimony. On the other hand, however, there is a range of potentialities within the concept of immaterial testimony that has not yet been sufficiently explored, and that could significantly corroborate and integrate the acquaintance, the sense of belonging and cultural participation of communities and hence promote the material preservation of historical heritage.

The field of cultural heritage preservation today (from the architectural scale to the territorial dimension of the landscape, and its natural and anthropised manifestations), besides being definitely responsible for its transmission into the future, also has strong potential to activate economic processes. In fact, community awareness and involvement in relation to heritage becomes a growing demand for knowledge and preservation of its value.

Such a positive phenomenon, if appropriately managed, can trigger a admirable process of significant economic importance, where the number of users is also useful for the conservation of cultural heritage; on the other hand, too large a number of users in conjunction with excessive economic exploitation can lead to the consumption and loss of the cultural asset itself. The coexistence and balance between the two components – 'material' and 'intangible' – in the built heritage and in the variety of meanings and ways of use that can be attributed to them is therefore to be considered crucial both with regard to the conservation and operational choices and to the economic repercussions that their management can determine.

Authenticity and preservation: use, memory, and trace

Material and immaterial preservation

In the last forty years, thanks also to the broad interpretation of the notion of 'cultural heritage', the area of interest in restoration has progressively extended to include a multiplicity of objects: not only 'monuments' but also the widespread built historical heritage. The acknowledged meaning of 'material testimony' also includes the scale of the territory.

But that is not all: once the notion of material testimony was acquired, it was progressively extended to the intangible traces that broaden the need to include in the concept of cultural heritage, socio-economic and ethno-anthropological expressions, whose existence is guaranteed by transmission that takes place dynamically over time through the traditions of speech and know-how, even in the absence of tangible objects (such as Sardinian 'tenor' singing style). They are related to the concept of cultural heritage in a different way as compared to the static permanence of material testimonies (Gualdani 2014). Another example of the connection between the material form of the manifestation and such an immaterial testimony is the intangible heritage constituted by the traditional method of cultivation of the vineyards in Pantelleria (protected by UNESCO). It is determined by specific know-how, consisting in practices tested over the centuries to determine the most effective way of cultivating vineyards on a windy island, that is, on the ground itself. The rural, economic tradition of this particular method of cultivation, due to the conditions of the area and to economic and social needs, along with the perpetration of transmission and practical application, has assumed a concrete connotation: it has had material, economic and social repercussions that have shaped the landscape of the island in untypical ways.

The theme of use

In addition to this important aspect, we need to acknowledge how the current disciplinary culture places the project of conservation of built heritage – considered as a process – at the centre, and generally intends intervention as a further stratification aimed towards preserving the material authenticity of things (buildings, urban fabric of historic city centres, territories), and that the future function needs to be considered in a broader sense than heretofore.

These transformations, which have occurred in more recent times, can be noted in the extension of the terminology. The multiple meanings that today come under the term 'document' referring to the built heritage (no longer to the single monument), as a multi-faceted historical testament, we can see that the new meaning attributed to words represent current thinking about restoration.

Some of these terms refer to the multiple requirements of the conservation project, in terms of usage, functionality and durability. For example, we talk about 'security' and 'accessibility' regarding use; or, if strictly referring to technical-operational aspects, we use concepts of 'compatibility', 'reversibility', 'prevention', and so on.

The words referred to (security, reversability, prevention) indicate the increasingly articulated and complex requirements of contemporary usage, as well as the range of multi-disciplinary knowledge required in an intervention that is conscious, appropriate and economically managed. They also reflect the acknowledged central role of the object of the intervention – and no longer the omnipotence of the restorative subject – and refer, substantially, to the future user¹. They suggest how the theme of the use of built heritage should deal with the complexity and problems of the contemporary world, starting from the management of processes in which the increasingly refined techniques and technologies often seem to give over-riding importance within a project to technical, economic and practical aspects, rather than cultural ones.

From this point of view, the significance of the material or immaterial document, in its authenticity, therefore becomes, in an increasingly substantive way, connected to the use to which it is put; to the existential dimension of the individual who approaches the cultural heritage not only passively, but also with an active role in enjoying it as a user.

The place of subjective appreciation of cultural heritage in shaping intervention is especially difficult because of its potential influence on the choices made in establishing priorities

and in the consequent interventions and management, and on how the heritage is understood from an economic perspective. In this sense, one of the greatest risks in the case of cultural heritage, is to bend the needs of protection to the needs of the user, thus meeting an easy public consensus. In this case, the fundamental role of cultural communication as a tool for bringing the public closer to the comprehension and cultural growth that underlies the enhancement of cultural assets and their virtuous economic management, is lost.

The theme of memory

Other considerations can be added regarding the theme of the acknowledged authenticity of material and immaterial heritage. Speaking of material heritage, for example, today we often find that there is a distance – not only in terms of time, but above all, in terms of culture – in customs, in the ways of living in the historical building, or in appreciating the urban landscape modeled by constructive practices related to geographical and territorial contexts. This distance has led pervasive perception of the environment (in the broadest sense of the term) in an increasingly distracted and superficial way. This is due to a progressive weakening of cultural linkages with local traditions, with the beliefs and intergenerational relationships that characterised the inhabitants of certain areas or territories. The hectic pace of globalisation and the movement of people have accentuated this trend. On one hand, the risk is creating, and indeed we already see certain forms of omnivorous tourism, where simulacra of history, become a ‘show’ to be experienced by the visitor. In this sense, ‘material’ heritage easily becomes associated with a particular meaning (immaterial) that is determined by its image and consequently can support an idea of authenticity limited to form, unchanging over time, thereby supporting the idea of restoration as recovery à *l’identique* (Fiorani 2014). These are the architectures of a past whose threads with the present have now been cut. The threads have been replaced by a quasi-historical memory, expressed through a stereotypical image expressing a time made even more remote than its own temporal distance from the present: like the Egyptian pyramids, the excavations of Pompei, the palace of Versailles and so on. These spectacular examples induce a passive and undifferentiated response in the visitor. But beyond such, when we discuss historic heritage, and when we consider the distinctive role of the individual in relation to it, we have in mind a potentially active role in relating personal experience of built objects to deal with buildings, contexts and landscapes from the past. Due to their constructional, technological and functional characteristics they are a fragile testimony to cultures and ways of life now lost. Often, without effective mediation they are virtually indecipherable. Yet their richness of meaning is the primary reason to preserve them.

Similar considerations apply to intangible assets, perhaps even more significantly. Considerations of heritage are linked to the desire to preserve memories and identify traditions, ways of doing things, artisanal production and processing methods, socio-economic and cultural manifestations. One wonders what has remained of the historical dimension (or of ‘histories’, included in the ‘material culture’ and the *longue durée*) considering the fact that the phenomenon of globalisation has now undermined the ways in which Western civilisation, until the very recent past, has traditionally built its self-identification with continuity through the same cultural and historiographic systems, which were the foundations for restoration.

The theme of the ‘trace’ of the past

Today this consideration seems to be an inevitable premise when approaching historical heritage, as the need to relate in a different way to the past and its possible interpretations seems no longer avoidable. This is because our collective identity is becoming very different as a re-

sult *inter alia* of our understanding of the present, in which the dialogue between ancient and new architecture, between past and present arises. On one hand the 'ancient' (or the 'past') drew its meaning through its connection with self-identification and specific cultural origins, historically identified and rooted in a time and a place; a bond which, as we have seen, today seems to be perceived in an ever more fragile and less immediate way. On the other hand, the 'new' (or the 'present') is more and more the expression of a multicultural society, of a new 'displaced' civilisation in which the globalisation of technological instruments corresponds to a basic absence of topological differentiation. Such global contemporaneity, in fact, now seems to assume its own identity and sense outside the traditional references modeled on the cognitive horizon of history; instead, within a new anthropological scale of the problem, it seems to relate to an interpretation of the world that passes through the filter of 'technique', as the philosopher Umberto Galimberti has so well described (Galimberti 1999: 353-355, 499-521).

From the perspective of restoration all this can be read as a 'document crisis', essentially as an expression of an identity crisis – or rather the search for a new way of representing itself – on the part of a multiethnic and globalised society that, in the undifferentiated multiplication of 'memories' of the technological-digital age, risks not knowing how to describe itself, which documents to produce, or how to recognise itself, showing difficulties in seeing itself projected towards the future. This aspect, in different ways, occurs both with material and immaterial heritage.

To some extent, albeit with the appropriate distinctions when referring to material objects and not to works of art, the theme recalls what Maurizio Ferraris notes about the problem of documentality, the need to leave 'traces' of memory, which implies an appropriate approach to the current proliferation of writing and digital memory (Ferraris 2009: 311-317) but also to the relationship that is established with it.

The challenge in the ability or possibility of recognising oneself in objects of the past can no longer ignore the awareness that it is possible to hypothesise new ways of approaching and understanding the meaning of things of the past, presenting a different scenario constituted by a sort of new knowledge, one that is possibly 'forgetful' compared to traditional historical schemes, but open to the discovery of 'traces' through new aspects of use and appreciation.

To undertake this new path, one must begin to explore the more uncertain paths of Memory. These paths are present in the collective mentality, albeit discontinuous and deconstructed within their encompassing, historically undifferentiated, timeframes, but which seem to correspond better to the complexity of our age² – paths wherein the meaning attributed to intangible assets seems to be more specifically immediate and related.

As a result, if Memory takes on the role of a common horizon of knowledge, in which the different languages and the different ways of reading the past can be confronted, the unifying referential element can only be the concreteness of things, the potentiality of the traces of memory of material objects, of places, of societies. This is what motivates the conservation of material and immaterial heritage.

In particular, going back to the subject of restoration intervention, as Stefano F. Musso states, the possible resources inherent to the area of immaterial testimony are also to be considered: "Not (...) only actions can affect the physical and material conditions of the building, by ensuring its conservation and enhancement in conditions of safety, efficiency and duration. Similarly, there are actions that could be defined as 'immaterial' regarding the artefacts or of the site, of how they are perceived and of their use should that be more carefully considered, because they could give the discipline of restoration and the protection of existing architectural heritage new impulses and unprecedented forces"³.

In the case of material testimony (to which a similar reference to immaterial testimony cannot be denied), preservation calls for permanent material authenticity as a necessary condition for the persistence of the testimonial value.

When we focus on authenticity as it applies to intangible assets we are dealing with transmission of the knowledge that enables continuing expression over time. It arises from repetition by individuals, by generations of people, so that changes over time. The authenticity of an intangible asset is rooted in its being part of the way of life of individuals and societies, of productive activities, of rituals and celebrations. In this case it is a matter of tradition, in which repetition over time is a composing element, and in the transmission between individuals and society (UNESCO 2003).

The Camino de Santiago enjoys both these aspects, and faces their complex and mutual interference.

Usage and sustainability as a possible future for the Camino de Santiago

The discussion on the preservation/consumption of the Camino de Santiago – but above all the short experience of traveling along a small stretch of road – allowed us to reflect in a personal and direct way on the specific case, on the actual and potential strengths and critical issues of preservation that significantly summarise many of the current restoration problems, on both theoretical and operational levels.

The question that arises is, in what ways can we address the process of preservation and reuse of historical buildings, without forsaking the legitimate needs of economic management, but at the same time giving back, or giving new meaning to the cultural reasons that the fundamental question “why do we restore material testimonies?” is based on. This question highlights the crucial meaning of restoration – the cultural dimension of the objects it deals with – and shows the need to open new paths, find new ‘traces’ of knowledge concerning the objects of the past that can best correspond to the changed scenario of the 21st century.

The Camino has existed for centuries as a pilgrimage route, and going through many different eras it represents an important historic and cultural testimony of these eras, the continuous religious, historical, political, social, economic, and cultural transformations, evolving, just like its very nature as a path, towards a destination, a journey progressing towards Compostela. It is a cultural asset, which is appreciated *in itinere*: besides the spiritual and psychological fulfillment it offers, there is also a physical and measurable time of the journey, and is characterised by its sense of being ‘one way’, as anyone who retraces their steps can experience, finding themselves on their own, in counter-flow.

As Attilio Brilli states, in contrast to the journeys to Rome and Jerusalem, where the pilgrimage was located in the places of destination (the Via Crucis in Jerusalem, the tour of the five basilicas or the seven churches in Rome), the fortune of the Camino de Santiago lies in the fact that the journey itself was a pilgrimage, studded with chapels, places of prayer and reflection, along the way to the sepulchre of St. James (Brilli 2017: 234-239).

In addition to being a ‘material’ heritage, and to its territorial dimension, the sequence of villages and rural settlements, religious buildings, historicised places of shelter, and landscapes, there are multiple immaterial values associated with it that are fulfilled through its usage. Due to its specific issues of preservation and usage – arising from the growing number of pilgrims and tourists – it can be considered an emblematic synthesis of the problems that preservation is facing nowadays in the globalised world, with social aspects, behaviors, mentalities and ways of life that must be taken into account in the management of cultural heritage.

The concept of preservation revolves around the maintenance of material authenticity as a prerequisite for the maximum endurance of historical evidence, without however excluding those transformations that arise from the deterioration of matter over time and the changed conditions of use. It is precisely on the maximum endurance of such material testimonies that one can rest the multiplicity of intangible uses of the Camino (a spiritual path, open also to people with disabilities in the most compatible way possible).

If continuing use is central to the maintaining the authenticity and memory of the original religious path, then one has to take account of the fact that the practice of faith changes over time. Such changes influence the mentalities of those experiencing the journey and how they connect with this dynamic immaterial heritage. Today, as we have discussed, there are different ways of approaching the path, no longer only those of religious nature, but also a more touristic one, 'profane', according to the vision most closely associated to its mystical meaning.

The pilgrimage spirit associated with the journey, broadened to a wider public, sees a sort of contamination between the 'mystical' and purely spiritual side of the experience and the more practical and material aspects that it involves – the unavoidable reflection of the transformations of society and of people's mentality.

We can say that these are authentic modes of fulfillment as well, albeit relative to the individual. Moreover and in general, a broader accessibility, in the sense of facilitating the use of the path, falls within the framework of contemporary culture and should not be seen as defacement *a priori*. At the same time it is necessary to establish boundaries between the correct requirements for safety and accessibility and the excesses of comfort that lead to the distortion of places and their transformation into commercial, and often exclusive luxury products – signs that indicate to weary travelers how to reach taxis (to the relief of some and perhaps the disdain of others) have become features of the landscape.

On the other hand, without wishing to diminish the high spiritual heritage represented by the Camino, we could also recall the controversy that arose among the 'purists' of the mountain when the installment of cable cars began: the summit had to remain an exclusive conquest reserved to few, as a reward for a particular physical and psychic effort, in opposition to the trivialisation of the experience provided by mechanical means of transport that allowed anyone to reach the same arduous destination without any effort. In similar terms, today we consider the topic of how to manage usage of the Camino in a sustainable way.

Taking account of the relative affluence, heterogenous interests and differing physical capacities of the new users, the focus should remain on maintaining to the greatest possible extent, the material testimonies, making a cautious, parsimonious response to the demands for facilities (hotels, transport, etc) so as not to destroy the nature of the Camino: the legacy of its spiritual and religious tradition, although still predominant, today is no longer exclusive, but is flanked by 'different' ways of usage, but must not be degraded. In fact, in this multiplicity of uses lies the dynamism of what can be considered the value of 'immaterial heritage' represented by the path, which is able to trigger multiple ways of usage, each endowed with its own authenticity, even if relative. It could be said that this dynamism is a positive interconnection between different ways of making the Camino – those who do from curiosity or for fitness may experience a gradual spiritual involvement, and vice versa.

It is indisputable that extension to an increasing number of users is part of our current vision of a civil and shared participation in enjoyment and cultural enrichment through cultural heritage. However, it is also clear that while addressing the 'enhancement' of usage, there must also be the concrete awareness of the need to conduct the transforma-

tion with the aim of constructing a virtuous economy that favors the process of sustainable preservation of the territories of the Camino.

Conclusions

As many experiences in conservation projects seem to have confirmed, the economic factor is now a basic reference for focusing on and effectively addressing the consumption and conservation problems of even such a special asset as the Camino de Santiago: a route through territories, built environments originating from small villages, rural farming and breeding activities, that supply produce for the sustenance of small rural settlements that inhabit the territory, characterising it according to the concept of 'granularity', intended as a correlation and participation of elements within a series of sequential links, each of which is fundamental to the other, which Donatella Fiorani quoted in the discussion.

The theme of sustainability as a consequence of the broader global debate about the future that places at the centre the problem of consumption of the planet's resources, also relates to, as it does to every other area of human production, the field of architecture, and especially that of restoration, in which the role of the project and the responsibility for its choices have been accentuated. In making these choices, as we have seen, the figure of the user has become dominant, and whose needs for use, safety, and greater accessibility in daily life have become necessary requisites.

Beyond the technical and operational measures that can respond more adequately to the needs of energy saving and the reconversion and recycling of built resources, it is essential that we take into specific consideration which direction the concept and the idea of 'cultural sustainability' has taken. Such consideration, intended as an open outlook towards the future, is necessary so that operational procedures can become meaningful and find new and original formulations to preserve the Camino with the value of its testimony, and not alienating it under the economic pressure of tourism.

We are not referring here to types of adaptation that the community today considers necessary for daily life (comfort, safety, etc.), but rather to their extreme adaptation, beyond the limits of what would be considered to be responsible use and consumption; nor are we considering attitudes related to 'mentalities' that are consolidated in unconscious and destructive behavioral stereotypes.

The prominent role assigned today to the user of cultural heritage, can become an important factor in the preservation of the Camino. Through communication with the public by spreading cultural information with the object of a more profound understanding of the cultural heritage and its context, the user can become more aware and respectful of the material and immaterial value of the Camino, and contribute to the preservation process.

This outlook offers the opportunity for further considerations, linked to the increasingly globalised dimension of both knowledge and individual interaction with heritage. Therefore, in a perspective that correctly tends to satisfy the needs of usage in an ever wider way, it is important to safeguard the permanence of those values of material and immaterial testimony which, as in the Camino, can determine a more solid quality of the daily relationship with the 'things' of the past, and also constitute a further factor in the commitment to their care.

The existence of values of memory in the material and immaterial traces of the Camino, conceived as testimony and transmission of multiple elements of knowledge, gives the individual the possibility of establishing infinite relationships of empathy with the places, buildings, and territories he crosses.

In a perspective like the current one, which feels the need at a global level to rethink the ways of the economy of production and consumption for an ethical and ecological vision of inhabiting the planet, perhaps a reconsideration of the role of usage, habits, the ways of appreciation and, more broadly, the responsibilities of the user, could also go through a rereading of the relationship between men and 'things'⁴.

Notes

¹ An overall picture of the current restoration techniques, both in the theoretical implications and under the more specifically applicative profile of the theme, is offered by the essays by S.F. Musso, D. Fiorani, A. Grimoldi, F. Doglioni, G.P. Treccani, C. Di Biase, E. Vassallo, S. Della Torre in Musso 2013a.

² In this regard see the interesting comparison between scientific investigation and humanistic reading of the theme of memory in Tadié 2000: 9.

³ Musso 2013b: 25. Translation by the author.

⁴ "The transformation of objects into things (...) also presupposes a developed ability to awaken memories, to recreate environments, to be told stories and to practice both the 'closed' nostalgia, which falls back into itself in the regret of what one is lost, is the 'open nostalgia', able to positively process the mourning of a loss (...). In 'open nostalgia' things are no longer subjected to the unattainable desire to return to an irrecoverable past, they do not adhere to the dream of modifying the irreversibility of time (...) but have become the vehicles of a journey of discovery of a past also of possible future". See Bodei 2010: 37-61; in particular, the quote is on p. 55 (translation by the author).

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