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“Duration and durability: The different faces of endurance throughout time in the stratified palimpsest. The case of Venice”

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An articulate perception of time led to the modern concept of a monument, which is not just regarded as a timeless piece of art but as documentary evidence of multiplicity, whose appreciation can be an ever-changing experience. Starting from the interest about time involving any cultural domain between the 19th-20th centuries, a general openness to space-temporality took place in Europe, changing the concept of knowledge and the sense of past.

The enhancement of the idea of time in terms of duration involved physics (space-time) and philosophy with Bergson and literature, with Proust and Joyce. The historical also changed from the idea of a univocal fact to a space-temporal event and the history of restoration itself showed a similar evolution, assuming time as a peculiar dimension of architecture, regarded as a living material document.

Following Riegl, the contemporary mind reflects on a transition from the century of the historical value to that of Alteswert (value of antiquity); a development value connected to the time of nature, giving buildings an organic evolution and letting their cultural meaning constantly change.

In terms of time, the contemporary approach to architecture shifted from a synchronous appreciation of accomplished forms toward a diachronic reading of the stratified matter. Thus, architectural stratigraphy is an effective tool to catch the traces of a building's passing through time and Venice a meaningful testing ground. During the Middle Ages, this city was a melting-pot, trading all over the Mediterranean, as well as in Northern Europe, collecting materials and building techniques and hosting workers coming from abroad. This ancient but extremely modern attitude toward cross-cultural exchange led to the peculiar architecture of Venice as a result. Furthermore, Venice, as an urban centre, did not expand very much because of its nature; instead, it grew upon itself stratifying layers, rather than demolishing-and-rebuilding its palaces. It continuously reshaped itself reusing materials and architectural elements, while following the changes of taste and withstanding an unceasing process of physical decay. Thus, Venice can properly be regarded as a stratified architectural palimpsest, maybe an icon of endurance, blending both the idea of duration – as the diachronic development throughout time – and the concept of durability – as the consistency of its constitutive matter, both being key issues for its preservation.

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