

la rivista di **en**gramma
2013

103-106

La Rivista di Engramma
103-106

La Rivista di
Engramma
Raccolta

numeri 103-106
anno 2013

direttore
monica centanni

La Rivista di Engramma

a peer-reviewed journal
www.engramma.it

Raccolta numeri **103-106** anno **2013**

103 gennaio/febbraio 2013

104 marzo 2013

105 aprile 2013

106 maggio 2013

finito di stampare febbraio 2020

sede legale
Engramma
Castello 6634 | 30122 Venezia
edizioni@engramma.it

redazione
Centro studi classicA luav
San Polo 2468 | 30125 Venezia
+39 041 257 14 61

©2020
edizioniengramma

ISBN carta 978-88-98260-51-5
ISBN digitale 978-88-98260-52-2

L'editore dichiara di avere posto in essere le
dovute attività di ricerca delle titolarità dei diritti
sui contenuti qui pubblicati e di aver impegnato
ogni ragionevole sforzo per tale finalità, come
richiesto dalla prassi e dalle normative di settore.

Sommario

- 6 | *103 gennaio/febbraio 2013*
- 66 | *104 marzo 2013*
- 156 | *105 aprile 2013*
- 308 | *106 maggio 2013*

106

maggio **2013**

ENGRAMMA • 106 • MAGGIO 2013
LA RIVISTA DI ENGRAMMA • ISSN 1826-901X

ANTICHITÀ IMMAGINATE

a cura di Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino e Olivia Sara Carli

ENGRAMMA. LA TRADIZIONE CLASSICA NELLA MEMORIA OCCIDENTALE
LA RIVISTA DI ENGRAMMA • ISSN 1826-901X

DIRETTORE

monica centanni

REDAZIONE

sara agnoletto, elisa bastianello, maria bergamo, giulia bordignon, giacomo calandra di roccolino, olivia sara carli, claudia daniotti, francesca dell'aglio, simona dolari, emma filipponi, silvia galasso, marco paronuzzi, alessandra pedersoli, federica pellati, daniele pisani, stefania rimini, daniela sacco, antonella sbrilli, linda selmin

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO INTERNAZIONALE

lorenzo braccesi, maria grazia ciani, georges didi-huberman, alberto ferlenga, kurt w. forster, fabrizio lollini, paolo morachiello, lionello puppi, oliver taplin

this is a peer-reviewed journal

5	Editoriale Giacomo Calandra di Roccolino, Olivia Sara Carli
7	Le 'vignette' della Tabula Peutingeriana Olivia Sara Carli
26	<i>Iulium Carnicum</i> . Dalle fonti umanistiche alle origini di <i>Iulium Carnicum</i> Martina Iridio, Sara Spinazzè
47	Metamorphosis of Ruins and Cultural Identity Marcello Barbanera
62	<i>I Carnets des voyages d'Hadrien</i> Pier Federico Caliari
79	<i>Mon cher Hadrien</i> . Marguerite Yourcenar, le <i>Memorie</i> , l'antico Nunzio Giustozzi
94	La cultura ai tempi del <i>digital</i> Flavio Mainoli, Federica Pellati, Giuseppe Salinari
100	A proposito della mostra patavina "Pietro Bembo e l'invenzione del Rinascimento" Paolo Mastandrea
103	Isabella d'Este "retracta de marmo" Lorenzo Bonoldi
107	Elisabetta Gonzaga come Danae nella medaglia di Adriano Fiorentino (1495) Monica Centanni

Metamorphosis of Ruins and Cultural Identity

Marcello Barbanera



Marcello Barbanera, *Metamorfosi delle rovine*, Milano 2013.

“Allegories are in the world of thoughts what ruins are in the world of things.” The philosopher Walter Benjamin synthesized in this formula the reasons why ruins from classical antiquity to the present are one of the most powerful metaphors of western culture.

From the point of view of cultural history, the meaning of the ruins extends across a wide spectrum of disciplines: literature, philosophy, painting, the history of the landscape, archeology, the theory of restoration, architecture, urbanism, sociology, psychoanalysis and others still. I would like here simply to trace the principle features of the *perception* of ruins in western culture, accentuating the experience of Athens and Rome.

The ruin is a marker at the edge of time. On one hand it marks the advance of time that has worked upon it and reduced it to a fallen wall, a phantom of a once whole ancient structure. On the other, it is also a resistance against time, a continuing witness in the physical presence of the construction. This attributes to the ruin a sense of continuity through time and adds value to its identity.

The oscillation between life and death, between memory and forgetting, decline and resistance, all are notions that pertain to a relatively modern perception of the ruin that arises from the era of the industrial revolution. At that time in Europe, the daily habits and the idea of time changed drastically under the influence of acceleration of the means of transportation and communication, and the new inventions like the steam engine, the railroad, and the rotary printing machine that fueled this change. As often happens in the history of mankind, the propulsion toward progress and modernity determines also a halting action triggered by the fear that the old world and its values might at any moment entirely disappear. It is in this context that the ruin became a cultural anchor, the custodian of memories in the attempt to oppose the acceleration of time and its imminent end. Before, the ruin had been perceived in a multivalent manner, with a variety of profoundly different meanings allusions and suggestions,

which I will seek to outline in the following talk, starting from the era most close to us and running backward to the ancient world.

The twentieth century and Marcel Proust's *Recherche du temps perdu*, the literary monument to memory, in which a meditation of ruins could not be lacking, open with an account of walking along the avenue to the rail station of Combray toward his own home and the observation that the gloom projected by the moonlight striking the objects, invested them with the effect of a landscape by Hubert Robert, the celebrated 18th century painter of ruins. The columns of the old post office seemed to him fragmentary, becoming itself the image of passing time. It became a symbol of time gone by and it admonished the writer that only time is immortal. The ruin is its witness. Proust grasped the desire to hold onto time, to capture it, but at the same time he is aware that oblivion and destruction are an essential part of time itself.

At the end of *Recherche*, time has by now gone, leaving behind only degradation and destruction, visualized in the decline of the body. Proust's novel proposal is that man before the spectacle of his own ruin becomes aware of his own vulnerability and of the futility of his actions. Everything is but vanity. In an analogy to the monument reduced to ruins, the life of man proceeds toward old age and death. At this point, however – and here is the difficulty with respect to a simple moralizing intention of the concept of the ruin on the ancient and medieval world – Proust recognizes the ruin's generative value: from the perception of the fragility of the human body, including his own, is born an urgency to narrate history as an antidote to the flow of time. Therefore the ruin becomes the fount of inspiration and the sign of regeneration.

The ruin in the classical world

The vital, creative dimension of the ruin was however unknown to the ancient world in which prevailed rather the memory of ancient Greece and the moralizing value of the Romans.

A heroic quality emerges from the ancient Greeks' first encounter with ruins. After the collapse of the first palatial structures of the Mycenaen civilization at the end of the 13th century B.C., Greece must have been littered with vestiges of cyclopic constructions of a by-gone era (which include walls, palaces and tombs), but their memories were faded. These ruins began to pique their curiosity in as much as they were perceived as a venerated antiquity. Thus, in particular in three regions, Attica, Argolide and Messenia, tholoi and chamber tombs by then for centuries no longer in use at the beginning of the so-called Homeric Age from the end of the 8th century B.C., became fulcrums of cult practices. These are reflected in the votive and functional objects and

ritual practices, deposited either in access corridors (*dromoi*) or inside funereal chambers. Cults arose on the ruins, instigated by the will to establish a link to their original occupants with the idea of legitimizing and reinforcing their own identities. It is plausible to assume that the Greeks already in the 8th or 7th centuries B.C. recognized in the Mycenaean tombs the funereal resting place of a disappeared race, a race that belonged to a past thought more glorious, therefore capable of instilling a sense of stupor in whoever ventured into the darkness of tombs.

Thus was born in archaic Greece a common language of heroism that continued through the travel literature of the imperial age. Even Pausanias in the 2nd century A.D., to cite a canonical example, when he visited the sanctuary of Olympia, harbors no doubts on the identification of a structure from the geometric era near the Pelopion as the residence of the legendary King Pisa Enomaos. At the same interpretative level, one can locate another emblematic treatment of a Greek ruin, the famous Oath at Platea that forbade the reconstruction of the temples destroyed by the Persians as a reminder of the defeat. None of these cases suggests that the Greek world had developed an aesthetic conception or even a simply archeological curiosity for ruins.

For the Romans, the ruin is an absence without the possibility of rendition, always integrated in a deserted landscape, evoking death. Ruins that struck the imagination of Latin poets were more those of the cities of a glorious past by now devastated, like Troy, Carthage, or Corinth. Troy in particular constitutes the object of a real obsession, because its ruins were both a tomb and a cradle at the same time, an allusion to the end of the Trojan civilization and the beginning of the Roman line through the genealogy of Aeneas to Romulus and Caesar and Octavian Augustus. It is Caesar particularly who pays a visit – perhaps apocryphal – to an ancient site in an episode that has been identified as the first example of a “ruins tourism” in literature, a sort of pilgrimage to the place of a family reliquary. Lucanus, in his *Bellum civile*, in the final verses, alludes to Caesar’s intention to move the center of Roman power to the site of Troy, building upon the very ruins of the ancient city of his predecessors that were still visible. This is a literary topos, perhaps reprised in some verses by Horace, and in the successive formulations by Suetonius reach well into the late imperial era, at which time they return to the idea of a *traslatio Romae* with Constantine.

The sentiments stimulated by the ruins of a once flourishing but enemy city are different. The moralizing value these kinds of ruins express is incarnated in the figure of Gaius Marius in Velleius Patercolos’s *Roman History*. Once a powerful political figure now a fugitive to Carthage is reduced to rubble by Scipione Emilianus in 146 A.D., Marius is impeded from remaining on African soil. The Roman hero is alone before the remains of Hannibal’s residence and

he meditates then on his own unfortunate fate. Around him, the ruins of the once flourishing city give only a sense of devastation and death. Their twinned destinies fuse in the consideration of how transient both the city and human glory are. The figure of Marius will then be crystalized in Plutarch's biography and, as such, becomes the archetype for intellectuals meditating on the ruins of Rome and its past glories. From Petrarch who admires together with a friend Giovanni Colonna the majesty of the ruins of the Urbs, to Poggio Bracciolini who's conversation with Antonio Loschi, later retold in *De variatate fortunae*, finds its echo in the grand manner of the 19th century history painting of Pierre Nolasque Bergeret.

The reason for which ruins cannot resuscitate any fascination in the eyes of Latin poets is that not a sufficient distance had intervened between themselves and the causes of the destruction they observe. The remains of Carthage or Corinth were not perceived as belonging to a far away and mythical realm, as the Mycenaean tombs were for the Greeks, but rather close in time. They still carried for the living the fear that a self-same destiny might befall them. Before the Praetor Africanus Sestilius Marius posed the example of the ruins of a great city overthrown by its own destiny in order to warn of the eventuality of a similar fate that might strike him as well.

The discovery of ruins from the Middle Ages to the age of Humanism

The Middle Ages inherited from the Romans the idea of the fateful ruin and the fragility of human endeavors. The presage of the unavoidable end of all human activities was the normal reference of the classical ruins of Rome. To this vision is joined the Christian notion of the fall of the pagan world, and a just destiny for a godless realm. Antiquity is not always considered as a place of the negation of the divine, while it exercised its ambiguous fascination on learned men. An example of this oscillation between admiration and admonition is represented by the work of Hildebert de Lavardin (born 1056, died 1134), bishop of Le Mans, who visited Rome several times and left some poet fragments known as the *Versus de Roma*. They exemplify a double attitude: on one hand the ruins of Rome with their grandeur that still succeed to transmit the power of the age, and on the other the reminder that Rome was the new Babylon, a place of idolatry and superstition, justly conquered by Christianity.

The medieval aesthetic categories, at least in the reflections of Thomas Aquinas, present a decidedly negative evaluation of ruins. In his *Summa Theologiae*, he defines the beauty of Christ as a proportioned and harmonious completeness, while its opposite, ugliness is equated with incompleteness, the fragmentary, and the disharmonious. In this perspective, the ruin and the fragment belonged then once to a complete form now disintegrated.

Petrarch overcomes the moralizing perception of the ruins of Rome, laying the groundwork upon which the myth of the rebirth of antiquity will be built in the Renaissance period. When the poet reaches the Eternal City for the first time, he is not drawn to the medieval center but to the ancient ruins, which he immediately recognizes as relics of humanity's glorious past that reconcile him to his own time. It is true that he observes the ruins in a state of total abandon, nonetheless they inspire in him the desire for rebirth. They are no longer inert witnesses of the past, but are alive in the present and can vanquish over time in the sense of restituting to the present the grandeur of the past through the study of antiquity.

Similar ideas begin to circulate, and with the work of the 15th-century erudite Poggio Bracciolini, *De varietate fortunae Urbis Romae*, of 1431 to 1448, the fascination for ruins moves from the literary dimension to an archeological one, so to speak. *De varietate fortunae* is a descriptive inventory of buildings, statues, busts, columns and inscriptions, in which antiquity is no longer seen as if from a distance but integrated with the modern. Bracciolini is a scholar who provides precise information, even if he at times indulges his penchant for curiosities drawn from the *Mirabilia*. He sustains his work with vast comprehension of the literary and epigraphic sources. And in addition, he is driven by a concern for direct investigation of the sites that ultimately leads him to study also building techniques and construction materials of the ancient structures, as is the case as well with Leon Battista Alberti.

We are in the era in which, along side the nostalgic contemplation of a dismembered antiquity, the desire for an ideal restitution of a Rome restored to its original splendor comes in. What Alberti asks of the ruins is something different. He seeks the revelation of an internal language of construction. This he wants to hold as a model of excellence that will be disseminated as a new architectural morphology based on numerical proportions and measure derived from the ancients. Like scholars of anatomy, architects and artists of the next generation will literally descend into the viscera of ancient Rome, desirous to take away from that majestic corpse the notions of normative creative principles, as we can observe in the allegory reproduced in the anatomy treatise *De dissectione partium corporis humani* of 1545 by Charles Estienne. A man is seen in the foreground, seated on a building gone to ruin. He opens his own body allowing us a glimpse inside. The building and the body are both ruins, and we are invited to examine the human organism through the scalpel's slices, like into an architectural interior through the grating of the window off-center, in order to see its internal functions.

Let us suspend for a moment this itinerary on the perception of ruins of Rome from the first humanists for a brief incursion into the ambit of the figurative arts. Perhaps the first evidence of a painted landscape with ruins may be this

scene from the cycle of the resurrection of the kings by Maso di Banco, the Miracle of Saint Sylvester, painted for the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce in Florence in 1337. The artist represents cracked and crumbling walls, in part invaded by climbing vines, with one column still standing among the heaped detritus. The episode is to illustrate the era of Constantine, and the architecture shown is to evoke the vestiges of Rome, more precisely the Temple of Vesta, near to where the miracle occurred. The images are arranged chronologically and in two parts: to the left the red-colored and complete buildings of the medieval city, to the right the blanched marble constructions of pagan Rome in ruin. The figure of Constantine, immobile amidst his court to the right, and the victory of the Church over evil to the left, relegate the Rome of the Caesars to a past that one cannot and shall not redeem.

In the celebrated Saint Sebastian by Mantegna of 1480, today in the Louvre, the saint is bound to a column remaining from a pagan temple. The saint's foot that rests on pagan idols sets up the allegory of the Church's triumph over paganism. This work belongs to a numerous group of paintings that employ ruins for a symbolic meaning. In the painting of the 15th century and in part in the 16th as well, ruins become a constant in the landscapes of nativity scenes to locate them in a prehistoric world. They can also take on the semblance of a mysterious oriental land. Beyond the usual iconography of broken arches, crumbling columns, detritus and vegetation that sprouts from walls, *et cetera*, these are all symbols of the decline of paganism at the advent of Christ. More rare are the paintings that figure real ruins like in this image of from the late 15th century where we can see Rome surrounded by walls and its most famous monuments within.

From the 15th century, however, the first use of ruins in an aesthetic context, be it literary or figurative, is the celebrated *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna, which was written in 1447 and published in its first edition in Venice in 1499. It consists of 170 engravings in which a strict relationship between text and image is maintained. The book is written in an invented language mixing Greek with Latin which has earned its author the designation of the James Joyce of the 15th century.

Polifilo, in the search for his love, Polia, reaches the gates of the land of love before which a bizarre decoration presents itself: a tangle of ancient ruins and overgrown plants, described in the greatest detail with associations in the romantic manner. The notion is still the allegorical that one finds in Dante, except that the visitors find themselves immersed in a landscape made up of classical architectural fragments, inscriptions, a sort of archeological landscape that reveals a Renaissance aesthetic motifs. The ruins, therefore stir a nostalgia for a past that is no longer felt as lost, suppressed by Christianity, but recuperable through a love –

a *philia* – for antiquity – *polia* –, therefore destined to live again. Polifilo's itinerary through the field of ruins reveals the passion of the early humanists for the Latin culture, and indeed while he proceeds, the landscape becomes progressively less jumbled. Mere observation quickly transforms into the desire to discover new remains and develop an archeological curiosity.

If the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* leaves us at the end of the 15th century with an image of the humanist anxious before the prospect of a rediscovery of antiquity, in a drawing of the 1530s by Michel de Malines (that is Michel Coxcie) we find perhaps for the first time a crucible of iconography from which painters of ruins will be inspired for the next three centuries, despite of numerous variations. An old man seated on a flight of stairs, among columns, he rests on a crutch and holds an hourglass, the symbol of time passed. All around, a desolate landscape with ruins that are about to be overtaken by growing plants, an allusion to the transitory nature of human things.

In 1515, Leo X named Raphael the papal commissioner of antiquities with the task of protecting the inscriptions, supervising excavations and drawing up a complete map of Rome. By Raphael's time, the description of ruins had become a literary genre with its own canons. Rome had become the destination of northern European artists on a sojourn that seemed indispensable to their education. Martin van Heemskerck, Hendrick van Cleve, Hieronimus Cock, and Matthijs Bril all made ruins the principle subject of their views of Rome, framing them in many ways: covered with creeping by vines, in degraded or exalted states, a repertory from which their colleagues will draw from in the following centuries.

From now on, the theme of ruins in painting will play out without interruption down to contemporary art of today in many different registers sometimes in the theatricality and sophistication of Mannerist painting, as in Herman Posthumus's *Landscape with ancient ruins* of 1536, sometimes with a pastoral atmosphere and a pervasive and calm melancholy as in the landscapes of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain, to cite only the greatest examples. Sometimes with a taste for capriciousness as in Monsù Desiderio. Soon, the most well-known ancient monuments – the obelisks, the Colosseum, the Mausoleum of Augustus, the Temple of the Sibyl in Tivoli – will become part of the repertoire that artists will use freely in honorific reconstructions of the ancient urban and country landscapes. A vestige of the past ennobles nature, transforms a banal vista into a heroic or idyllic landscape. Soon, the phenomenon of the Grand Tour will emerge, and ranks of painters and engravers will get to work serving numerous aristocratic Europeans come to Italian soil. Their portraits will be composed with reliefs, statues and vases against a background of the Roman countryside complete with ruins. Giovanni Paolo Pannini specialized in kalei-

dosopic canvases that gathered together the images of places and monuments the tourist consumed as his own unforgettable aesthetic experience.

Hubert Robert, called “Robert of the Ruins”, was a painter highly appreciated by the philosopher Diderot, because in his paintings he captured the meditative potential of the ruins of even modern buildings. In the moment in which he paints the *Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie du Louvre en ruine*, in 1796, Hubert seems to confer a greater dignity on the building, projecting it into a future condition of a ruin and elevating it thereby to the rank of a Roman ruin. Modern architecture, in an imitation of the ancient, acquired the elevated rank that it expects from history. As such, it will become in its turn a model for future generations, a sort of anticipated ruin. The ruin, then, departs from the merely picturesque, from the atemporality of an imagined ancient world, to become the object that stimulates reflection on the passage of time and on the human condition. One cannot close a discussion of the 18th century without speaking of the magnificent views by Piranesi, but as Piranesi opens a new era in the condition of the ruin, I will return to him after a few general considerations on the century.

The ruin and the landscape

Through the 18th century a new phenomenon in the field of ruins develops. While Piranesi and Robert exalt them in paintings, ruins also begin to emerge from the painted canvases and manifest themselves concretely in the philosophical landscapes of the 18th century garden. This phenomenon would not have been possible without a certain disposition toward nature and a greater capacity of comprehending the laws that govern it.

The garden of the 18th century has more than a mere decorative function; it becomes in this century a kind of geographical, historical and cultural microcosm inserted in nature. The artificial ruin is born, or reborn, as an expression of the garden architect’s refined taste. Gardens provide stimuli to the imagination and philosophical reflection for the aristocratic patron and lover of beauty.

The artificial ruin in a philosophical garden represents both the monuments of the distant past as well as a complex and ironic meditation on them. Past, future, and the present are by now merely illusory concepts. One can imagine how this subtle aesthetic may slip easily into fashion and reduce the ruin to a mere decorative flourish. An extreme example of this taste for the artificial ruin is the famous column house in Désert de Retz, built for the art connoisseur Francois Racine du Monville who imagined it. In its architectural extremism, the construction seems to aspire to an abstraction. The interiors are arranged within the broken shaft of an enormous Doric column, full of artificial cracks

and covered with a bizarre teetering roof structure that marks the culminating point of a capricious society on the wane.

Between fragment and totality

The metaphor of the ruin in the 18th century, as we have seen, developed in a variegated repertoire ranging from an object of philosophical reflection to one of bourgeois convenience. What is certain is that the era of the Enlightenment was ready to respond to and appreciate the aesthetic of the fragment, once condemned in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas. Fragments and ruins reflect now more adequately the incompleteness of the sum of human knowledge. This is the watershed at which philosophical thought formulated the aesthetic categories that made the appreciation of the incomplete work possible. If on one hand, Winckelmann pined over the fact that the grandeur and beauty of the Torso Belvedere could be judged only from that portion that remained, the philosopher Schlegel saw in its fragmentariness the creative potential of an eventual completion that stimulates the imagination. This prefigured the Romantic sensibility. The development of the appreciation of the fragment seems unstoppable in its progress towards modernity; the torsos of Rodin in the 19th century, the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke who, observing Roman ruins, is pleased with their very fragmentary nature that manifests the fragmentary essence of ancient art. On the other hand, one of the greatest literary works of the 20th century, Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, is presented in the form of a gigantic fragment, and its protagonist seems to exist in an ensemble of destroyed or detached parts that can no longer be recomposed. It is modern man, constrained to live in a shattered world and aspiring to a lost totality. One can recognize this best in artistic creations, literature as in the figurative arts, that allude to the loss of completeness, to fragmentariness, to disorientation. In this vein, the neglected objects of the quotidianity by Arman, the decontextualized ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp, Futurist deconstructions, the mechanical systems of Jean Tinguely, the slices and holes of Carlo Fontana tending towards self-destruction, the archeological installations of Anne and Patrick Poirier, and many others.

But let us return to the 18th and 19th centuries and to Giambattista Piranesi. His visionary engravings represent a complex phenomenon. He aggrandized the ruins of Rome to colossal dimensions, rendering them witnesses to a remote heroic past that outstrips our imaginative capabilities. The buildings are covered with vegetation and abandoned to an unstoppable decline to a much higher degree than seen in the views designed by his contemporaries. They are populated by a minuscule and fleeting people, some of whom seem to be investigating the ruins as an antiquarian would. Moreover, the ruins pull the viewer into the image they show him the fleetingness and the confusion of his own

existence. Like those who are lost in the midst of the ruins without escape, the viewer feels lost in life and in the midst of a thousand concerns, while he does not realize that life itself slips through his fingers. Piranesi's engravings become the final point of a long period of the history of the reception of ruins.

After Piranesi, the exuberant imagination had to make way to science. In the minute that divinity and ancient heroes were identified and explained, the fate of the poetry of ruins is set, because a necessary condition for the enrichment of ruins was their incomprehensibility. The sentiment for ruins in the 18th century is followed by the reawakening of historical thought that de-poeticized the documents of the past with the advance of the scientific method. While Greco-roman antiquity became the object of science, the Gothic ruins then came to occupy the canvases of landscapes of desolate atmospheres, ruined abbeys in frozen natural backdrops, as in the works of Caspar David Friedrich. In the paintings of the German Expressionists, the ruins achieved in the bourgeois consciousness a dolorous revelation, unsettling in the images of the Surrealists, to the point of the horrors of war unmasked by Georg Grosz and documented by the Realist cinema, to arrive at much contemporary art.

Landscapes and Museums

With the 19th century, therefore, the landscape with ruins was destined to change, because the process of excavation broke the enchantment of the collapsed building that had earlier enriched so many romantic dreams. A century later, after many excavations had already occurred, Louis Bertrand embarked upon a critique against the damages caused by archeologists in Athens, Eleusius and Mycenae. They were, he advanced, responsible for having eliminated the very reasons for travelling to Greece:

Science is like locusts; wherever they go they leave nothing behind but skeletons. The tombs are emptied, the reliefs detached, the statues are boxed up to send to far-away museums, the frescos deteriorate due to the chemical agents to make them photograph better... It's a bitter joke to invite us to come to view bits of brick or masonry, the foundations of walls, trenches and holes with the pretext that there was once, in this place, a city or an illustrious monument.

Bertrand's invective introduces us to the theme of the ruin in the new landscape created by the archeological excavation and inside the museum from the 19th century down to our most recent experiences. Today's image of the Acropolis, for example, is the result of a precise ideological will to obliterate the cultural palimpsest that the monumental complex presented still at the beginning of the 1830s, immediately after the liberation from Turkish domination. The result is that the Acropolis today has the look of a desolate land, a

rocky outcropping, from which emerges the fetishes of an artificial antiquity of the 5th century B.C., the result of a cultural ethnic cleansing. The temple of Athena Nike can hardly be considered an ancient construction. Dismantled around 1686 by the Turks, it was rebuilt between 1834 and 1837 using as well the materials from two Turkish military constructions. It was dismantled again between 1933 and 1938, and reconstructed yet again in the general works undertaken on the Acropolis in 2000, still on-going. Also the Erechtheion underwent an analogous process after the damage incurred in the war of liberation. In 1844, the Caryatid porch was reconstructed, and two years later the Turkish mosque inside was demolished. Théophile Gauthier, visiting the Acropolis in 1877, noted:

They have made a museum of the pinacoteca and set up a sort of anatomical classification of the statue fragments found on the Acropolis, across Athens and in the environs. Here, all the heads, over there the trunks, to one side the legs, the other the arms, and so forth, everything mutilated, incomplete, a kind of Vale of Josaphat for sculpture in which each body if put together with this collection of limbs would result in something quite confused.

The German archeologist, Lambert Schneider, has provocatively sustained that had Karl Friedrich Schinkel's project for the erection of a palace on the Acropolis for King Otto of Bavaria, the new Greek sovereign, been realized, paradoxically it would have wrecked less damage than what has taken place afterward in the course of the 19th century. The medieval and Turkish remains would have been preserved, engulfed in the planned building, instead of being wiped away: the Turkish houses, the Venetian, Byzantine and French remains, as well as the Roman ones that were always poorly considered.

Today, the Acropolis of Athens is not an agglomeration of real ruins, but the result of a reconstruction of antiquity in modern times where nothing authentic remains, neither the view of the ensemble nor the single parts. Everything has been liberated from the traces of history and, in the end, the whole complex could be better ascribed to the category of an 18th century artificial ruin. This was already understood by a traveller at the opening of the 20th century:

To have suppressed everything that seemed to you from the 5th century B.C., you believe to have before you now the very thoughts of Phidias! What an aberration! You have simply created a new thing of the Parthenon, a thing of the 20th century.

Rome is, from this point of view, also an exemplary case at the beginning of the 19th century. During the Napoleonic dominion, some excavations were begun, among them that of the arena of the Colosseum was dug up and finished. The illuminist approach won out here over the use of the area for religious rea-

sons. Pope Pius VII, once returned to Rome in 1814 after the fall of Napoleon, had the excavated area refilled and the fourteen stations of the cross around its perimeter restored.

The excavations above all in the center of ancient Rome, however, even after the French retreat, continued at a moderate pace and with renewed intensity after 1870 under the new Italian state. We should clarify how the ruins that conditioned the urban image of Rome throughout the centuries have now been modified by these excavations. Deprived of their original aura, they begin now a new phase of their existence. They become, in fact, part of an excavated zone and, like many remains, are transformed eventually into documents only of themselves.

Before the end of the 19th century, the large part of the Roman Forum and the Palatine was completely excavated. The zones look today like a vast area of archeological investigation deprived of all aesthetic pretence. The earth is thrown open in the midst of the city, and basement foundations once packed with dirt can be examined with the objective gaze of the specialist. And today's typical viewer, the bourgeois traveller with a decent education who dives into the study of archeological remains with the help of a guide, relives the grand events and persons of history associated with each famous place.

With the total excavation of a space as vast as that as the Roman Forum, archeologists find themselves confronted with substantially unsolvable problems: which epoch of the past is to be privileged in the excavation's presentation? The republican age? The imperial, or late antique? How can one render a building's slow transformation recognizable to the viewer? One cannot preserve everything, so a lot gets taken away, often regretfully, and then other layers remain beneath, such as those of the archaic period, with only a few exceptions. In other instances, the lower layers are simply covered again. Every excavation implies an inevitable tampering with the historical document, even if the principal scope is its conservation. The struggle against degradation of the ruin initiates at the same time its scientific study.

In the midst of this debate, Mussolini begins a series of brutal interventions in the urban context of centuries of stratification in the heart of the city. The ruins are used as a scenic backdrop for significant focal points. At the center of the Fascist building program are the grand military parade routes, primary among them the aptly-named "Via dell'Impero" (street of the Empire), that leads across the imperial *fora* from the Colosseum to Palazzo Venezia where the Duce addressed the crowds with political slogans that presented the Rome of the Caesars as a model for the current Regime. Against this, one has to account for the irreparable destruction of a lot of archeological data, sometimes even entire structures, due in part to the ideologically-driven concentration on the ancient imperial era, and

even more so to the enormous pressures on the archeologists to accelerate their work. The fact that Mussolini was hardly interested in the historical monument *per se* is evident in the example of the well-preserved Meta Sudans fountain, which he had demolished without hesitation merely because it blocked the planned parade route through the Arch of Constantine. An aesthetic-emotive approach to ruins was still widely sought, as is evident in the scenographic designs of nocturnal illumination, which make them appear isolated from the urban context. In the 18th century, one had the impression still of the sheer height of the walls, the falling of the vaults, the difficult paths that wound through the mountains of detritus; today, for administrative and organizational reasons of safety, naturally, the largest ruins still extant are mostly inaccessible or visitable only along precisely prescribed paths.

For the preceding generations “ruins” and “decadence” were synonymous. The perception of transience conditioned every approach to the ruin, constantly referring to the experience of finality and man’s mortality. The melancholic attitudes of the 18th century visitor followed on from that. The experience of transience, however, is banned from the modern approach to the ruin. In its place, a will to conserve and at all costs the actual state of the monument. Our epoch is audacious enough to suppose it can accomplish anything [*s’illude di potere tutto*], even stop the passage of all-powerful time. It is difficult to say how much this derives from a concrete need of an historical memory, or rather to a new form of fetishism.

The answers are many, and they vary according to place. In some Mediterranean countries, like Greece, Turkey and in northern Africa, the urge to reconstruct is determined by the significant impact tourism has had upon their national economies. The result is the transformation of sites into a kind of Disneyland, as in the case of Epidauros.

It is a demonstration of how at the moment we are returning to a method of presentation of ruins that fell out of fashion in the 19th century, a sort of revival. That is, to bring the building back to an arbitrary origin and present the form as if entirely cohesive while ignoring any successive interventions or damages that may have occurred through time. Instead, a restoration, I affirm, must seek to preserve the complexity of the monument. These should be undertaken when it becomes justifiable to intervene and complete some of its parts out of structural necessity or reason of conservation, rather than by any aesthetic motivation. These priorities could be inverted, however, in cases where the aesthetic value of the ruin has been integrated already for centuries in a particular ambience that has given rise to centuries of imaginative stimulus of artists and travellers that in turn reinforce those aesthetic values. The *anastilosis* – or re-erection – of the architectural fragments in the Temple of Zeus of Selinunte, for example, should

be blocked with the argument that it would destroy a cultural context, whose loss would not be matched by any scientific information acquired from the building.

As far as Rome is concerned, for years now, and accelerating in the last decade, we are looking to sew back together the urban fabric around its still majestic if indeed cumbersome ruins. The solution does not reside, naturally, solely in archeological issues and with those who pose them. The ruin is like the subconscious – to borrow the celebrated Freudian simile – and it is good that it be brought to the surface. The city, like the human being, gains understanding of it thereby. Likewise it is opportune that this happens in healthy bodies. The modern functioning city fabric and the human being are in search of their proper equilibrium.

One of the priorities of a city like Rome is the creation of large museum complexes like the Forum, for example, but it is lacking in even elementary information for the visitor. We well understand that a profound understanding of the archeological landscape of such a complex stratification presents a difficulty even for the prepared visitor, and its presentation is no easy thing. Certainly a tourist can avail himself of a guide, but such instruments are incomplete or insufficient and describe only abstractly the diverse phases of the building before which he stands, leaving a lot of room to the imagination. Ruins cannot be illustrated only by referring to their present physical state. One needs to use published materials, reconstruction models, drawings and panels that document the phases of growth of a monument or a complex. More often, the information at an archeological site accentuates one phase, the one considered the principal phase. This is, in effect, a kind of manipulation of the visitor, leading him to believe that the Forum, the Arch of Titus, the Senate House, or any other monument has a date of birth and a death/date of construction and an end of use, and passed through without undergoing restorations or rebuilding. One loses in this fashion the fundamental idea of cultural and historical *dis*-continuity through time. It is a simplification that impoverishes the communication of ideas. We need to render the ruin intelligible to the visitor, seeking to reach a presentation that considers the emotional, symbolic, cultural and ambient value, both from the past and into the future. We need to define clearly the message we are trying to communicate, so that the visitor learns to enjoy the monument, while avoiding the type of reaction, captured so acutely in this *New Yorker* cartoon, of these two American tourists.

Italian abstract

Il saggio prende le mosse dalla constatazione che faceva Arnaldo Momigliano e cioè che le tracce della nostra storia nei monumenti, nel paesaggio sono così imponenti da incuriosirci e obbligarci

a studiare il passato per capire una parte importante di noi stessi, soprattutto in un'epoca in cui il modello culturale occidentale, quello che affonda le sue radici nel mondo classico, pare sospinto verso una marginalità che si frantuma nell'impatto con altre culture ansiose di emergere.

Comprendiamo così come le rovine conservino da un lato l'immagine di memento mori, allusione romantica alla transitorietà di ogni opera umana, al passaggio inesorabile del tempo, al declino delle civiltà, al disfacimento delle culture, profezia di un destino possibile perché non c'è requie alla distruzione; dall'altro esse costituiscono fortunatamente il simbolo della caparbia resistenza degli esseri umani di fronte alle sciagure peggiori e serbano il carattere distintivo e inalienabile della nostra identità culturale.



pdf realizzato da Associazione Engramma
e da Centro studi classicA Iuav
editing a cura di Silvia Galasso
Venezia • maggio 2013

www.engramma.org



la rivista di **engramma**
anno **2013**
numeri **103-106**

Raccolta della rivista di **engramma** del Centro studi **classicA | luav**, laboratorio di ricerche costituito da studiosi di diversa formazione e da giovani ricercatori, coordinato da **Monica Centanni**. Al centro delle ricerche della rivista è la **tradizione classica nella cultura occidentale: persistenze, riprese, nuove interpretazioni di forme, temi e motivi dell'arte, dell'architettura e della letteratura antica, nell'età medievale, rinascimentale, moderna e contemporanea.**