

AUTHENTICITY IN PRESENTING HISTORY: THE INFLUENCE OF RUINS ON VISITORS' IMPRESSIONS

ABSTRACT

Ruin is a physical occurrence, almost always present within a historical place. As a visual expression of passing time, it has a huge influence on the impressions of all the observers. The question considered in this paper is whether the feelings of the observers of historical ruins and buildings here described as follies, and later in this paper referred to as true ruins and false ruins, diminish the feeling of authenticity of a historical place in a modern setting.

KEY WORDS: AUTHENTICITY, RUIN, FOLLY, PRESENTATION, ORIGINAL, COPY, OBSERVER, IMPRESSION

INTRODUCTION

According to Tim Edensor, a professor of geography and touristic sciences at Manchester Metropolitan University and theorist of identity and space, globalisation and popular culture, in the present era which is absorbed by consumerism, memorable events, places and objects are produced and sold as *authentic* and nostalgic commodities, while history is transformed into a spectacle by its “intensified mediatisation” (Edensor 2005:126-127).

These ideas from the realms of modern tourism take us back to some of the basic polem-

ics from the history of art – the importance of authenticity and the relation between an original and its copy, and to the next question: “Which is to predominate—historical fabric or transhistorical ideal?” (Levine 2008:15)

In this study, we will attempt to find similarities between *true ruins* - buildings damaged due to a historical conflict, a natural disaster, or altered through the course of time, and *false ruins* - buildings built as ruins, and, thus, judge what influences these two kinds of buildings have on the visitor's impressions. *False ruins* can here be observed as copies of the *true* ones, even in cases when they don't completely correspond to the

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originals. They both possess a common feature, a factor of ruination, either gained or enforced, which for this study is of greater importance than their complete physical appearance.

AUTHENTICITY OF THE ORIGINAL WORK AND ITS COPY

According to Wim Denslagen, a contemporary theorist and a professor of history and art history at the University of Utrecht, “replicas have always had a right to exist”, a copy represents “an act of homage to its original”, while the process of copying represents “an act of commemoration”. (Denslagen 2009:167) In the middle of the 18th century, Alexander Gerard (1728-1795), a Scottish art theoretician, wrote that “similitude is a very powerful principle of association which augments our pleasure”, but also that copies improve in their “charm” not only by their “exactness of imitation”, but also because of the “excellence” of the work they represent. (Denslagen 2009:167)¹

Wim Denslagen reminds us that, before the end of the 18th century, there were no written sources on the topic of authenticity in architecture or art, marking the appearance of Romanticism²

1 One of the studies from the same period, regarding the question of originals, copies and imitations is found in the work made as a review of art lectures given by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) at the English Royal Academy of Arts, entitled in the same way - *Seven Discourses* and published in 1778. See one of the later editions: Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997)

2 Romanticism had different approaches to the conservation of historical buildings. Two of probably the most important theorists of architecture of the 19th century, both with a romantic view of heritage and the past, but with attitudes directly opposed in the realm of the practical protection of historical monuments, were the English writer, theorist and painter John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the French architect, restorer and theorist Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879). Ruskin frowned upon any kind of intervention on historical buildings, except basic conservational acts which kept them safe from decaying, therefore in-

as the moment from which the topic of authenticity arises, and was later accepted in architecture and art of the 20th century. According to this author, this was an unconscious mixture of two different concepts of the topic of authenticity: the first one, according to which a historical monument is already authentic because it presents itself as a document of the past, and the second one, in which authenticity equates to honesty and an opposition to any kind of imitation (Denslagen 2008a:1).

After this, authenticity became a sort of a “modern cult”, as was written by David Lowenthal, a retired professor of geography at the University College London and a UNESCO and ICOSMOS expert. Thus, in studies about the protection of cultural heritage, authenticity is mostly understood as the truth put up against a lie, it glorifies the original over a copy, honesty over corruption, the sacred over the profane, always forcing us to understand it as “an absolute value, an eternal set of principles from which we ought never to swerve.” (Lowenthal 1995:369)

Still, the possibility to judge, respect or generally accept the authenticity of a historical work depends on the observer and not on the observed. Many philosophers have written about the observer, his experience in observing and the

sisting upon keeping the spirit of a building given to it by its builder, while le-Duc became well-known for his extensive interventions during restorations, whilst wishing to revive monuments and was often criticised for his free interpretations. Both the authors influenced the development of modern movements in architecture and the general acceptance of the topic of authenticity in the 20th century. Still, today the attitude towards protecting monuments is closer to Ruskin’s understanding of minimal measures of conservation, with an often unjustified criticism of all le-Duc’s interventions, which, in fact, had actually saved a great number of French medieval monuments from decay and even collapse. The different attitudes of the two authors can be ascribed to their domains, i.e. to the fact that Ruskin worked only within the field of theory, while le-Duc worked on the actual restoration of the buildings.

observed object. Studying the work of Heidegger, Karsten Harries, a professor of philosophy at Yale University, wrote about the *yellow book* which is only yellow when it is represented like that and when we are open to accept it as such (Harries 2009:17). The meaning of the term authenticity also depends on the way in which we wish to describe things from the past. This is why we can ask the following question: will a replica of a work from the past be an authentic work of its own time, once we observe it from the period that follows its creation? (Denslagen 2008b:3-4)

THE TRUE AND THE FALSE RUIN

According to Rumiko Handa, a professor of theory and history of architecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a theorist of phenomenology and hermeneutics in architecture, ruins³ promote positive and productive distancing between their original contexts on one side and interpreters on the other (Handa 2010: 2-3). This distance means that a ruin, just like any other building, possesses “textual autonomy”, which separates it from its original meaning. (Handa 2010: 2)

Tim Edensor wrote that a great number of “fragmented stories, elisions, fantasies, inexplicable objects and possible events” within a ruin,⁴ represent history which can begin and end anywhere, thus rejecting the main, already accepted narratives (Edensor 2005:141). A ruin does not rely on the significance of its original purpose or context, upon which its historical value is based (Handa 2010:3). It represents “a space outside the Apollonian processes of disciplinary ordering”, in which people are under surveillance in order to ensure that they are acting “appropriately”, according to conventions regarding usual behaviour. (Edensor 2005:94)

³ Handa here refers to historical - true ruins.

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A *true ruin* of a building often stands in an eternal state of collapsing, and as a result of a historical conflict it becomes a kind of a historical document, possessing the capacity to evoke different emotions. Ruins and images of ruins possess an ambiguous status, which can be called “half building, half nature”, but also a “unique value as physical manifestations of the destructive effects of time, and thus as representations of history itself” (Stead 2003:53). A ruin is conceivable in a way that does not depend on the education or taste of the observer. Here, Edensor’s description of a ruin can be introduced, in which it is fragmented as an allegory of a memory, imperfect, incomplete and does not offer a clear understanding of the past itself, even if we possess “the necessary expertise”. (Edensor 2005:141)

It is difficult to post a real definition of a building called a *folly*, inevitable throughout the history of art and architecture, whose rapid development started in the 18th century, with European landscape gardens. The development of *follies* originated from people’s affinity to archaeology, a great number of curious people who rushed to visit historical places throughout the world and the development of archaeological parks with historical ruins. What is important for this study is that *follies* were often erected in the form of ruins, usually as copies of an actual, historical ruin. Different authors tried to classify specific buildings as *follies*, but the classification is actually still a matter of personal interpretation. Barbara Jones wrote about a *folly* as a useless building. According to Sir Hugh Casson, “the mark of a true *folly*” is that it was erected to offer pleasure to its builder and even more, to surprise the stranger. The *folly* is connected with the departure from general norms and made with the intention to be looked at and enjoyed. (Whitelaw 2008:5)

Mark Cannata, an architect and a former director of the department for culture and heritage in a well-known English architectural firm, wrote that all of the ruins, no matter whether they came

Collage Sculpture “Architectural Fragment” is made of photographs taken from:

1. “Stories: Art & Culture, Petrus Spronk: Ceramist and Sculptor”, DAAG.org, <http://www.daaag.org/node/10> (accessed December 12, 2012)
2. “Библиотека штата Виктория”, Австралия (accessed December 12, 2012) <http://www.yakhnov.ru/go/note/2007/07/05/state-library-of-victoria/>
3. “State Library of Victoria, H4NUM4N Photo-stream”, Flickr from Yahoo, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/hanuman/1675203429/> (accessed December 12, 2012)

4. “Stories: Art & Culture, Petrus Spronk: Ceramist and Sculptor”, DAAG.org, <http://www.daaag.org/node/10> (accessed December 12, 2012)
5. “Architectural Fragment - Petrus Spronk (1992)”, Upkeeptheape Blog: Rafael Barletta, <http://upkeeptheape.blogspot.com/2012/05/architectural-fragment-petrus-spronk.html> (accessed December 12, 2012)
6. “Melbourne Sights, Robert Mark Bram Photos”, Picasa Web Albums, <https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/6i4L0ncslX7pHKUkpPM9iw> (accessed December 12, 2012)

into being as a result of the passage of time, different people and their lives in them or were erected as a representation of the existing time and culture, possess their own life and identity, they are interacting with history, geography and “fusions of past and current cultural identities.” (Cannata 2010:2).

Ever since the 18th century, the existence of patina⁵ on various objects has become as precious as the object itself and today it is inevitably connected to the existence of authenticity. In the narrow sense of the word, patina can be defined as the aging or weathering of the exposed surface of a material, while in its broader sense, patina represents everything that happens to an object over the course of time (Clifford 2009:126). If we accept the narrow sense of this word and understand patina as one of the physical manifestations of an authentic object, while accepting that patina can also be false, caused artificially and, as such, can trick the observer (Clifford 2009:127), then the question of authenticity, i.e. the importance of authenticity on the impression of an observer, can be revisited.

⁵ The Latin word patina relates to a type of shallow dish. See Helen Clifford, “The Problem of Patina: Thoughts on Changing Attitudes to Old and New Things”, in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, ed. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker, 126 (Oxford, UK: Elsevier Ltd. in Association with the Victoria and Albert Museum London, 2009) http://ebookey.org/Conservation-Principles-Dilemmas-and-Uncomfortable-Truths_756386.html

CONCLUSION

A ruin represents an unknown past and an object of imagination for the observers. It draws their attention to their own world and to themselves, to their “infinitesimal occupation” within the continuum of time and their temporality (Handa 2010:1). These features are possessed both by historical ruins and buildings called *folies*.

“Telling stories about the past, about people, places and things and sharing them with others is an ontological condition of social life.” (Edensor 2005:159) While standing in front of a historic ruin, we unconsciously put ourselves into connection with a specific place, its spirit and its history, thus in stories combining our personal with the social and vice versa (Edensor 2005:160). While being observed, *folly* as a kind of *false ruin* evokes the same feelings. Architectural copies evoke pleasant feelings in observers, reminding them of highlights of the past. Such imitations bring us “zeal” with which the original is imitated. It is the same feature that originals get from their creators; actually a copy offers a kind of satisfaction to the observer, recalling the admiration of the people from the past for the original work they created.⁶ (Denslagen 2009: 167). “It is

⁶ After this Denslagen thesis, we can speak about “the Pleasure of Imagination” as an output of the “Action of the Mind”, comparing ideas coming from “Original objects” from nature to ideas we receive from “Statue, Pic-



Table.

Sculpture “Architectural Fragment” located in Melbourne, created by artist Petrus Spronk in 1992. It can be called a building, a folly and a false ruin, made for joy and amusement, in a constant state of falling, causing the same thoughts among the observers as a true ruin does - about the human temporality and inevitable passing of time.

apparently comforting to live out one's days in an atmosphere of centuries-old traditions". (Denslagen 2009:175)

During the "Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention" held in 1994,⁷ Marc Laenen, an art historian and a former ICCROM director, showed that authenticity does not only lie in physical structures of the built heritage, but essentially in their spirituality, the meaning they possess for a culture and, therefore, in the continuation of the evolution and development of society (Laenen 1995:353). Does Buddha's statue lose authenticity when, after it has been damaged, the local population in Thailand, where Buddhism still represents the biggest living religion, replaces a lost limb or head? For a person from the West, who would expose such a damaged sculpture in a museum as a work of art, it probably does, because all the additions characterise it as a fake and, therefore, make it a copy. Still, for the local Thai people, the Buddha's sculpture represents much more than a work of art. For them, it is not a museum artefact, but a matter of spirituality, an object of respect and here authenticity, as understood in western civilisations, simply does not matter (Charoenwongsa 1995:289). "The proof of a thing's being right is that it has power over the

ture, Description, or Sound" representing these objects. This pleasure arises after viewing and studying something which is big, new and unusual, or nice. We never need to see original objects on which later works were modelled, it is enough if we have come upon similar or analogous objects, since we accept ideas through imagination, we develop them and file them, always in our own specific way. It is impossible to find a cause for this pleasure, which we feel in front of a copy of a work ("Arts of Mimicry"), just like in front of the original it originates from. At the beginning of the 18th century, this is how, in his daily publication *The Spectator*, editing the first issue in 1711, the English writer and essayist Joseph Addison wrote. See in: Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* No. 409-421, in *Eighteenth Century English Literature*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussell, Jr. and Marshall Waingrow, 332-553 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969; (Denslagen 2009: 167).
7 The result of this conference is the declaration on authenticity, i.e. "The Nara Document on Authenticity". See: "The Nara Document On Authenticity (1994)", ICOMOS http://www.international.icomos.org/charters/nara_e.htm (accessed September 29, 2011)

heart, that it excites us, wins us, or helps us... and there is no goodness in art which is independent of the power of pleasing." (Ruskin 1904:18)

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TABLE. 2. FOLLIES.

1. Mow Cop Castle, near to Mow Cop, Staffordshire, Great Britain, built in 1754 as a summerhouse looking like a medieval building.
2. "The Long Thin Yellow Legs of Architecture", Rotterdam, The Netherlands, designed by Coop Himmelb(l)au, built in 1988 as a sculpture for an exhibition.
3. "Untitled (folly)", photo design by Jim Kazanjian, done in 2010 as a collage made of pieces from other photographs.
4. "The Canford", commercial "off-the-shelf design", prefabricated standard design follies available on market today.

Collage made of photographs taken from:

1. "SJ8557 : Mow Cop Folly, Mow Cop, Staffordshire", Geograph, <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/88648> (accessed December 12, 2012)
2. "Folly for Sculpture In the City", Coop Himmelb(l)au, <http://www.coop-himmelblau.at/architecture/projects/the-long-thin-yellow-legs-of-architecture> (accessed December 12, 2012)
3. "In Focus: Jim Kazanjian", Archinect Features, <http://archinect.com/features/article/35541103/in-focus-jim-kazanjian> (accessed December 12, 2012)
4. "The Canford", Garden Dreams, <http://www.garden-dreams.net/Offshelf/The%20Canford.html> (accessed December 12, 2012)

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REZIME

AUTENTIČNOST U PREZENTACIJI ISTORIJE: UTICAJ RUŠEVINE NA DOŽIVLJAJ POSMATRAČA

KLJUČNE REČI: AUTENTIČNOST, RUŠEVINA, FOLLY, PREZENTACIJA, ORIGINAL, KOPIJA, POSMATRAČ, DOŽIVLJAJ.

Za doživljaj posmatrača ruševine nije bitno iz kog je perioda građevina čiji je ona ostatak, koja ju je nacija gradila ili koju je namenu imala, pa ni to da li je ta ruševina *istinska* (istorijska) ili *lažna* (*folly*). Stanje propadanja, bilo da je nastalo prolaskom vremena ili prikazano sa namerom, prisutno je kod svake ruševine i navodi posmatrača da razmišljaju o svojim i životima ljudi iz prošlosti.

Priča o autentičnosti je nastala u osamnaestom veku, a *poštovanje* prema njoj je *propisano* dva veka kasnije. Oduvek se nalazila pomalo u oblasti subjektivnog doživljaja i prihvatanja istorije od strane svakog pojedinca i svake kulture, pa

prolaskom vremena pojam autentičnosti i njegova upotreba dobijaju drugačiji smisao. Danas se autentičnost ne mora nalaziti samo u fizičkim karakteristikama jedne građevine, već i u njenom značenju za kulturu i nastavak razvoja društva kome pripada.

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