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Scientist or Artist in Relation to the Monument? Comments on Dehio's Analysis of the Roles of the Architect and the Art- historian in Monuments Conservation

In 1901 Georg Dehio published his famous polemic paper "What Will Become of Heidelberg Castle?" Within the framework of contemporary discussions on the conservation or restoration of the castle ruins, he indicated the difference in principle between the working methods of architects and art historians: *"An architect is partly technician, a man of applied mathematics and physics, partly artist, an organ of creative fantasy. He can only behave towards the artworks of the past as a researcher, empathiser, but not as a creator. From the moment he enters this relationship— whether he wants to recognise it or not —he becomes a scholar of art in accordance with his task, and whatever he thinks, says or does on this ground can only be measured according to the general measure of aesthetics. The so often claimed contrast is therefore not even existent in the theory. Nevertheless, in practice he steps forward in the other moments when he is called upon as an architect to lay hands on a historic monument, to maintain or extend it or to reconstruct it. In this situation it is impossible for many architects to distinguish intellectually between their scientific function and their artistic function. What they see in their mind's eye as artists becomes historic certainty to them."*¹

This analysis which attempts to create a neutral and unbiased profile of conservation activity later became significant as a provocative (and consciously biased) position in the further debate. The continuing heritage of an idealised concept of the monument as shaped by Viollet-Le-Duc was meant to be overcome by a modern, scientific notion. Monuments, now understood as authentic documents of the past, were henceforth to be protected not only from dilapidation and decay, but also from falsifying appropriation by the present. Dehio's contribution to the re-orientation of German monuments conservation as a scientific discipline is beyond doubt. And yet today it is clear that subsequently, the differentiation posited by Dehio has led to a confusion of the architect's and the art historian's roles vis-a-vis the architectural monument. Indeed, the well-meant view that only the scientist should be required here,² but not the shaping creator – when this view is transferred in a generalizing way from museum conservation to the broader tasks of monuments conservation – has the consequence of making architects who are untalented in design appear suitable for monument conservation, while the talented ones distance themselves from it.³ This already becomes clear during architects' education. Together with this stands the commonly-held but misleading thesis that the main enemy of cautious conservation is the "artist architect" who subordinates all respect for the historic document to his expressive possibilities in design. Some major but occasionally "ruthless" architects are frequently mentioned in this connection.

This negative image of contemporary architects greatly exaggerates their role and influence. For the broad social processes of modernisation that are largely responsible for the disappearance of historic building fabric are only steered by architects to a very limited extent. When it is precisely the most artistically serious and capable amongst them – such as Karl-Josef Schattner or Aurelio Galfetti – who practice a rigorous dealing with individual monuments, then we may permit ourselves to recognize in this negative image a rejectionist attitude: one does not wish, by

performing a single careful but by no means socially representative, indeed rather obscuring architectural intervention, to serve as a historical alibi for the work of destruction carried on all around it.

With this popular criticism of individual creative achievements, does one not often make the person who has put their finger into the wound responsible for it? Apparently, the problem likewise arises with certain works of visual art in which the modern desecration of nature is provocatively and painfully thematised (Josef Beuys, Nils Udo, ...). The critic is quickly identified as the actual sinner.

However, in this context we do not mean to defend a provocative, hostile stance that sometimes accepts the damage or loss of substance for the sake of artistic veracity. The intention is merely to point out that the constant effort from Dehio's time until today to purify monument conservation from every artistic component could lead to ruinous alliances with the other side. The methods of the (natural) sciences try to lock the subject out of the process of cognition. Since the true artist insists on his subjectivity, he is by definition to be kept away from the monument.⁴ On the other hand, by defining itself as scientific, the research and care of cultural monuments is surrendered to spiritless, methodical formalism as long as it renounces its own design intentions. So for instance Hans Döllgast's post war repairs to Munich's Allerheiligen-Hofkirche, interventions that both did justice to history and were architecturally impressive, have had to give way to a scientifically-argued reconstruction of the vaults, the historical and constructive legitimacy of which is questionable.

The majority of scholars – in agreement with Dehio – rejects these kinds of reconstructions in monuments conservation. However, the participants in the Heidelberg restoration debate, who were so clearly categorised into good and evil, can also appear in reversed roles: scientifically serious methods in the service of history-falsifying reconstruction on the one hand, and “creative fantasy” as the medium that affirms tradition on the other.

One now often hears that this dichotomy between reconstructive and creative design interventions is not really a topic for modern, scientific monuments conservation, since as a rule there is no reason *whatsoever* for “artistic” intervention in the monument. In principle, the responsibility to maintain substance requires neither creative design nor scientific restoration or even reconstruction.

The older the monument, the fewer plausible reasons in fact exist to intervene constructively or artistically in its substance. However, when age-value – which ultimately ennobles and legitimises decay – is not yet paramount, then such noble restraint often endangers substance. The best examples of this are our most recent monuments, buildings of the fifties. The necessity of change is often beyond dispute because the original construction and the way materials were used has led to serious damage. No one really wants to see buildings by Egon Eiermann or Rudolf Schwarz come to a swift but authentic end. Older monuments, especially those “timeless” relicts of anonymous architecture, already have this selective process of selection and adjustment behind them – the only ones that have survived are those that were constructed comparatively fault-free or those changed by the following generations to improve their longevity.

ON A DIVISION OF CONCEPTS AND ROLES

On the one hand Dehio differentiates between scientific work and artistic work (of the architect), on the other between research on and maintenance or change to the monument by “taking matters in hand” in the practical sense. Whereas he

categorically assigns research and assessment of the monument to the domain of science so that everyone occupied with it “becomes an art scholar in accordance with his task”, he in no way accepts the differentiation of working areas for the second field, which requires taking matters in hand in order to care for the substance practically.

Since the architect most often involved in such work easily confuses the two areas and attempts to solve problems of analysis, that is scientist’s tasks, with an artist’s view, and since he then goes on to interpret his artistic view as a “historic certainty”, Dehio also demands for practical conservation an architect who limits himself to archaeological and technical knowledge without artistic skill. (He leaves open whether this ideal architect should not possess these skills at all, or had better possess them - as a precaution, so to speak, in case science reaches its limits – but should refrain from actually exercising them).

Dehio rejects the artistic responsibility of a designing “creator” for the field of monuments conservation. He can do this in a very illuminating way in the context of the time, by referring to the “historical falsification” in the sense of an artistic-fantastic, but rather “irreverent renovation of monuments” practiced by the 19th century. From this morally-founded position he would like to see conservation practice essentially allocated to the “area of historic-critical thought”(!).⁶

Knowledge and thought, not skill and creative work is supposed to assure the maintenance of monuments as historic witnesses?

Naturally Dehio is no longer speaking here as a scientist, but as the partisan, convinced and convincing advocate of an ethically-founded idea which in turn becomes aesthetically influential: “Conserve, do not restore”. He equates “conserve” with scientific work and “restore” (in the understanding of the word at the time) with artistic work – an inexact allocation, but plausible from the macroscopic view of the observer who does not have to perform the one nor the other sort of work. Considered in detail it is not so simple, as a famous exception makes us realise.

The modern presentation of the antique Aegina sculptures in Munich’s Glyptothek, their scientific-*conservational* montage as connectionless fragments floating freely in space – an operation that precisely corresponds to the alienating fragmentation of the modern aesthetic experience; this presentation was no less of an artistic achievement than were Thorvaldsen’s *restorational* additions in the 19th century. Both measures had the one objective of presenting the sculptural pieces in accordance with the contemporary aesthetic taste – both times connected to the sincere scientific attempt to do justice to the gable in Aegina. ⁷

Dehio’s uncompromising appropriation of architectural monuments into the custody of science remained without greater influence in practice. However, theoretical arguments continue to reinforce it up to the present day.

A less apodictic distribution of roles, one that does justice not so much to the status-related self-images of the parties concerned than to their actual activity in theory and practice, suggests itself if one carries Dehio’s analysis to the end and also accepts the reverse conclusion implied there: As soon as matters are to be “taken in hand”, then the architect, and not only he but also the historian can only behave as “artists” towards the monument. At that moment the architect is no longer a scientist – in exactly the same conceptually narrow sense in which, according to Dehio, the architect researching a monument is not an artist, but an art scholar. ⁸

Where he has a say in practical measures carried out on the monument (i.e. concrete construction measures), he becomes a designer and hence an artist in the broadest sense. Any “scientific” decision about an intervention in a structure which is based on

the interpretation of analytically conveyed data is an artistic choice, whether intentional or not. It also remains as such, even when it is hedged verbally for the sake of scientific legitimation and described with a degree of rationality comparable to other sciences.⁸ Anyone who takes such a decision, be it an art historian, architect, tradesman, natural scientist or building owner, must also take responsibility as a designer. It follows that the absolute and sole competence for practical monuments conservation in no way lies exclusively with architects – in many cases a sensitive art historian should be given priority over an insensitive architect. However, the art historian too should be aware that when he decides in favour of a façade colour or a particular replacement for lost door panels, he relinquishes his role as a historian and always also becomes a creative artist, perhaps even predominantly. Already at the point where, in his capacity as an inventorying conservationist, he selects the witnesses to history which are to be protected, he takes things in hand interpretatively; he must make a “discriminating” judgement and thereby participates in the larger decision the composition of the monument portfolio that a society wants to afford and maintain. To a certain extent, he assists in composing a great “assemblage” that is created little by little from many existing individual artworks or witnesses to history. Here he finds himself in the company of the modern artist, who works with selected found pieces – objets trouvés – from the real world. One need only think of early Dadaist montages or contemporary works by Christian Boltanski, Nikolaus Lang or Raffael Rheinsberg.

It might seem superficial to compare the conscientious work of a conservationist who is acting out of responsibility towards posterity with the playful artistic search for form. Much separates these areas of creativity, not least because of the custodial role of the conservationist, who cannot lay claim to the owner’s rights of disposal over the objects of his affection.

Nevertheless: At a certain level of his activity the conservationist indeed resembles an artist who examines the structures of the real world with scientific rigour, in order to create a new “event” with the finds selected from those results. Where conservation’s responsibility towards society and posterity cannot be fulfilled without aesthetic judgement, conversely there is conscientious work in the playful “arbitrariness” of the true artist.

To be sure, while the effect of alienation achieved by the decontextualisation and regrouping of found objects is important for the artist, it is suspect, even unwanted by the conservationist for his objects. However, the question is whether he is always aware of such an effect; whether he takes conceptual responsibility for the alienation that he has no choice but to accept. For every monument is removed through its protected status from the “normal” development of its built context over the course of time; alienated in this way, it stands in a special and entirely artificial relationship with other monuments and with its changing environment.

The distinction between scientific and creative (artistic) production can be applied to other conceptual pairs: structure - event, diagnosis - therapy, perception - interpretation. The second term in each pair always demands subjective interpretation, evaluation and decision. It is here that such primary characteristics as modesty and piety first find their place in every conservation task. In this respect Erwin Panofsky ascertained for art history that “archaeological research without aesthetic re-creation is blind and empty, and aesthetic re-creation...without archaeological research is irrational and often leads astray”.¹⁰ And the Italian architect Vittorio Gregotti addresses this same idea with regard to his work as a

designer in historical contexts: "...History thus presents itself as a strange instrument: its knowledge is indispensable, but once it is acquired, it cannot be used; it is a sort of passage that must be traversed, but that teaches us nothing about the art of walking".¹⁰

The necessity of practical action that arises with monuments on a regular basis is always accompanied by the change from the responsibility of the scientist to that of the creator. Monument expertise and monument research develop the basic knowledge; monument conservation, however, must be more than the mere application of this knowledge. Even scientific analysis carried out with the greatest effort in no way guarantees a correct (?) or good (?) solution¹¹ as many examples can illustrate.

When an historic house is being repaired, an initial Gothic version of the facade in dark red is found preserved very partially under a newer layer of flaking plaster. The building is located in a self-contained ensemble of similar houses that were reshaped during the Baroque; the light colour scheme of their facades is partly preserved in the original. Restoring the building back to its first (verifiable) Gothic version would be problematic due to its effect on the ensemble; a (historically probable) Baroque version is not verifiable; and the existing surface employs a false technique (plaster mixed with cement) and is not sustainable.

It is quickly understood here that the scientific findings alone do not help the monument, but can only offer assistance in what is a practical and thus ultimately also a creative decision. The example may appear extraordinary – in essence however, the same problem is inherent in a multitude of tiny conservational decisions. Findings show us layers and their chronology; however they tell us nothing about motivations. Perhaps the first version of a classicist facade was seen by its owner or the architect as a mistake and was renewed – we restore it today as the scientifically "verified" original facade as it was at the time of construction.

To name a last example, when a broken monolithic door lintel must be replaced out of structural necessity, then perhaps the form and material of the damaged original may be correctly imitated in the scientific sense; whether this imitation obscures the true history of the monument, whether it would be better to replace the lintel with a more robust one made of reinforced concrete – these questions are not scientific, but the kind posed in creative practice, that are determined by economic, social and not least ethical and aesthetic criteria. With regard to the monument, as in all practical fields (politics, medicine, and so on), knowledge, experience and intuition are equally necessary but not interchangeable. Schinkel, one of the founders of monuments conservation in Germany, once pointedly referred to the subsidiary role of basic knowledge: "For the task of judging, many are chosen; for that of doing, very few – this is why we must honour mastery".¹³ Wolfgang Brönner describes the necessary interplay in a more balanced way: "When concepts are not blurred and every mode of evaluation is effective in the right place, then both scientific and emotional (artistic) interest in the monument can work together constructively. The analysis of historical meaning leads to the constitution of the monument and to the designation of the aspects of its substance and appearance that are worth preserving. The emotional attention that results from aesthetic contemplation helps to preserve the monument as a monument."¹⁴

OR SIMILARITIES NONETHELESS?

Let us therefore try not to blur the concepts – scientific research vs. creativity – without

of course attributing them exclusively to one professional group or even to one area of education. But can they then be distinguished from one another at all, beyond their theoretical definitions? Are they not continually dependent upon each other, are not the concerns of the artist and the scientist the same in some regards? Dehio warned against confusion: "What they [the architects] see in their mind's eye becomes a historical certainty; psychologically a quite understandable confusion ..." – and one to which historians can be equally liable, when what they read from the substance as scientists no less easily becomes a historical certainty. In fact it is a matter of more or less plausible interpretations. (The objection that the truthfulness of scientific results is verifiable, whereas artistic ones are not, would not likely stand up to a strict test.)

Otto Borst once quoted a statement from the FAZ that he saw as "lapidary, but true": "Besides, history-writing is not an objective science." To this he added: "History as such is that which has passed, that which is dead, that which first comes alive in our imagination. History first emerges through the creative power of thought – whereby we add, in parentheses at least, that there is an unavoidable connection between thought and speech. Even pictures require interpretation, and hence intellectual-linguistic processing, as sources of history."¹⁵

By contrast Dehio's definition of historiography, still in the mode of the 19th century before Nietzsche, saw it as objective, rational science, a producer of truth; its opposite number is the artistic skill that produces beauty in a subjective, often irrational way. Riegl was further ahead here: "...we modern subjects are the ones who endow monuments with sense and significance."¹⁶

With the further development of the sciences in the 20th century, the view (by no means new) took hold that it would be too limited to regard the (Western) concept of scientific work as the only correct and successful tradition of knowledge. The dubious nature of such claims to objectivity was exposed once and for all by "critical theory". Finally, it was demonstrated, for example by Thomas Kuhn, that it is precisely the generation of theory in the "hard" natural sciences that occurs in part through intuition. Scientific analysis is one (successful and privileged) method for drawing useful insights from material and history, but it is not the only one. At present its fundamental superiority cannot be convincingly argued either empirically or logically.

Even within the sciences, completely different questions and approaches and diverse cognitive methods exist, so that the widespread claim to universality of thought processes bound exclusively to rational concepts seems dubious at the least. Thought that is scientific in this very narrow sense is for example unable to grasp much information that is not discursively, but rather only figuratively comprehensible. Whereas conceptual thought processes its data by "relating it to judgement" (Kant) and is therefore linear in process, figurative thought comprehends informational material through comparison, and is thus has a many-faceted process. "In the rational thought process the results are unequivocal. Depending on whether the rules of linear links are adhered to or not, the judgement can be true or false. The results of figurative thought are equivocal. They cannot be true or false; however they can be clear or unclear."¹⁷ Jacob Burckhardt, one of the founders of systematic aesthetics sought very consciously – in the tradition of Goethe's "contemplative judgement" -- to merge scientific and figuratively visual work – his writings are works of science and art simultaneously.

Scientific results are interpretations. Secured by rules and disciplinary traditions, they can achieve the status of authoritative paradigms or at least widely-accepted "facts" for a while. However, the artist too delivers recognised interpretations of historic truth in his own way. Why should historians and artists keep each other away from the objects of their research, for example historic material, by claiming to know the only path to

lively interpretation of historical reality? The objection might be raised here that the historian only interprets theoretically, without disturbing the historical substance, whereas the artist's interpretation intervenes in that substance. What has already been said applies again here: In straight-up building archaeology, the researching "artist" does not attack the substance either; but in the practice of conservation, also the – now creating – "historian" or "scholar" does it.

As a component of monuments conservation theory, Dehio's differentiation between artist and scholar is only relevant today as an element of history; in practice it was always only conditionally useful.¹⁸ In a continuation of Dehio's approach according to which the architect first becomes a scientist in relation to the monument, it is time to relate this distinction not to professional groups or to educational backgrounds or professional affiliations, but rather to the actual work. What is required here is to abandon the clichés of professionally-defined classes of scientists and artists. In research on monuments, the laws of science apply as Dehio demanded, however narrowly or broadly formulated they may be in individual cases..On the other hand, where the conservationist takes things in hand in any sense of the phrase (i.e. also through bureaucratic acts), be he architect or art historian, he leaves the terrain of a science "assured" though conventions and enters the open field of shaping that which he "sees in his mind's eye".

NOTES

1. Quoted from: Georg Dehio, Alois Riegl; Konservieren nicht restaurieren. Streitschriften zur Denkmalpflege um 1900. Braunschweig / Wiesbaden 1988, pp. 34-41, here p. 36. Likewise, the further terms and passages quoted, unless otherwise indicated.
2. "Only archaeological and technical knowledge, not artistic ability comes into consideration there . . .", *ibid.*
3. This was not always the case, but is almost universally true for modernist architects – think of Loos and LeCorbusier – in whose thought Dehio's view appears again in polemical form.
4. On this radical-scientific tendency, cf. for example: Gert Thomas Mader, Aus- und Fortbildung von Architekten für Aufgaben der Denkmalpflege, in: Das Baudenkmal in der Hand des Architekten, Umgang mit historischer Bausubstanz, Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz, Bd. 37, Bonn n.d. (1988/89). Here history is presented as conveyable only through the scientific analysis of material substance. The plausibility of the exact research methods propagated here, whose consequence and depths is otherwise to be admired, suffers under this fundamentalist claim.
5. In anthropology, the objects of interest were studied, measured, classified and interpreted with a similarly disciplined distance well into our century – but have not the artists (painters, poets) communicated at least as much to us about the world and the value of the "wild"?
6. Dehio, *ibid.*, and *Idem.*: Denkmalschutz und Denkmalpflege im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, Festrede Strasbourg 1905, quoted here according to Dehio/Riegl, as in note 1, p. 101.
7. This is true even though the occasion for the new presentation by Ohly were different. Cf. Kurt W. Forster, Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture, in: *Oppositions* 15, 1981, pp. 11-13.

8. On this, see above all: Antonio Hernandez, Gedanken zum Wissenschaftsverständnis des Bauhistorikers, in: Arcus Bd. I, Wissenschaft, Zum Verständnis eines Begriffs, Cologne 1988, pp. 47-55. More directly related to practice is Georg Mörsch, Erforschen und Erhalten oder die Wissenschaftlichkeit der Denkmalpflege, in: Johannes Cramer, ed., Bauforschung und Denkmalpflege, Stuttgart 1987, pp. 11-15.
 9. A principle of formal logic states that a "should" may never be deduced from an "is". In the transition from technical description and scientific analysis to practical suggestions for action, axiomatic codes of value are always playing a role, for instance in the form of ethical principles. Instead of hiding them in a supposedly scientific deduction, they should be laid open and argued (since they cannot be proven).
 10. Art history as a humanistic discipline. In: Sinn und Deutung in der bildenden Kunst, Cologne 1975 (engl. orig. 1957), see below.
 11. Il territorio dell' architettura, Milan 1966, p. 133 (trans. T.W.).
 12. Cf. the well-founded and balanced account of this by Andreas Arnold, Naturwissenschaft und Denkmalpflege, DKD 1/1987, pp. 1-11.
 13. Architects often seem to prefer to follow the example of a master, for example Scarpa, rather than the results of building archaeology when dealing with a monument. This may be precisely due to the fact that the work of the "master" provides assistance in solving a problem that, in the practice of design, lies beyond scientific insight. Anyone who believes that the form to be given to a necessary intervention can be the result of scientific analysis alone, suppresses these problems. But since they cannot be avoided in practice, he becomes the prisoner of formal clichés; their false imperative is only strengthened by the fact that it cannot be acknowledged. On this problem, cf.: Denise Scott-Brown, On Architectural Formalism and Social Concern: A Discourse for Social Planners and Radical Chic Architects, in: Oppositions 5, 1976, pp. 99-112.
 14. Geschichte als Grundlage und Kategorie des heutigen Denkmalbegriffs, in: Die alte Stadt, 1986, p. 184.
 15. Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Denkmalpflege für das Leben, in: Die alte Stadt, 1988, 1, p. 7.
 16. Alois Riegl, Der moderne Denkmalkuhus, sein Wesen und seine Entstehung, Vienna 1903, quoted here according to Dehio/Riegl, as in note 1, p. 47. Cf. also Riegl's sharp criticism of Dehio's contradictory attempt to present conservation as a science, in: Neue Strömungen in der Denkmalpflege, Vienna 1905, printed in Dehio/Riegl, as in note 1, pp. 117 ff.
 17. Hans Daucher, Künstlerisches und rationalisiertes Sehen, Munich 1967, p. 11.
 18. Let this unprecise statement be allowed in the present context; it is of course known that analytical observation already changes the object examined, and not only indirectly in that it influences its reception, but also directly insofar as the analysis influences the operational framework through its results. This is especially true for monuments conservation, even if recently-developed, largely non-invasive diagnostic methods are employed.
 19. Dehio himself was flexible in practice and even while remaining loyal to his principles, pleaded for the recognition of other motivations than the scientific ones in individual cases. On this, cf. the preface by Marion Wohlleben in Dehio/Riegl, as in note 1, pp. 13 and 17.
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