SURFACE PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION IN ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION[1]

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ABSTRACT

Architectural surface shapes volumes, externally, internally or, in most cases, defining an outside and an inside. When comparing human body with a building, architectural surface is easily identified with the skin: membrane for protection and exchange (nowadays more than ever, with its active role in energy efficiency, health, and well-being of users), primary communication outpost, and place where all signs of illness and passing of time emerge.

The design and construction of a building correspond to the materialization of multiple contingencies in a specific historical moment. In the same way, interpretation depends on the observer. Starting from visual examination, it can unfold on various levels, from the most spontaneous to the deep and complex questioning gaze of the scientist. The surface is also the place where "myths" are most likely to arise, as in the case of black-and-white Modern architecture.

Every intervention implies a decision on the image (thus, the surface) of a building. This affects its meaning, being the significance and values of cultural heritage the object and product of every conservation intervention. Any decision underlines some aspects to the detriment of others. At the time of the construction this choice could have existed only theoretically, whereas in restoration it is often an actual choice between different possibilities, that often coexist in the current building as superposed layers. Opting for a univocal reading, or for the complexity of various perceptions, does not depend only on the conservator, but sometimes on the object, and clearly on the cultural context. Names given to things determine reality: words have labile borders and can sometimes function as methodological recommendations.

Key-words: Architecture, Conservation, Interpretation, Surface