

### Scientific Symposium

Changing World, Changing Views of Heritage:  
the impact of global change on cultural heritage – Technological Change

7 October 2009  
Valletta, Malta

## CHANGING MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MAN AND MONUMENT THROUGH HISTORY

Andrzej Tomaszewski

Why did we choose precisely the topic “Changing Views of Heritage” for the present scientific symposium? Was there any specific reason arising from this particular time? After all we know that through the millennia and centuries the forms of contact between man and historical monument have undergone change.

This concerns direct visual contact and indirect contact through various forms of communication: verbal, literal and visual. Also undergoing change are the intellectual and emotional relationships, through perception of differing material and non-material values of the historical monument. These processes however have accelerated significantly, and in recent decades we have witnessed a double explosion, of mass tourism and mass media. By modern mutations *homo sapiens* has become *homo mobilis* and *homo comunicans - cyberantropos*. The *movens generatio* now includes all age categories for whom the car, train and plane have become part of the ordinary equipment of daily life. The *rete generatio* (net generation) - for whom the computer is their natural environment, the media is the space in which they construct their own world, and the computer mouse is their basic cognitive tool – which has now reached maturity and reaches for political and economic power.

How has this great communication and information revolution influenced human perception of monuments of architecture and ancient works of art? What changes are caused in our psyche by the constant balancing between reality and virtual reality? To what degree does that enrich our intellectual and emotional lives, to what degree does it lead to shallowness and simplification, and maybe lead to schizophrenia? And how does it influence our relationship to the cultural heritage of history?

Intuitively, we feel that we have entered an unknown world of experiences and impressions, which is constantly expanding its scope, we do not however attempt to describe the existing situation in a scientific manner from the point of view of the perception of the cultural property around us. Studies and prognoses formulated by philosophers, sociologists and psychologists are concerned with general problems connected with the entry of humankind into a period of the information revolution. We are reminded of the Canadian investigator of the Internet, Don Tapscott, who in a book published in 1998 „Growing up Digital” announced the birth of the Net Generation. The same author in a book „Grown-up Digital” published last year described the Net-Gen as a formation based on dialogue, for which one-way communication no longer suffices, hence the growing popularity of instant messaging - IM and blogs. Don Tapscott gives the interesting example of a student of Harvard University, Mark Zuckerberg, who before an exam on the history of art created a website on which he placed photographs of works of architecture and art and asked fellow internauts to send extensive comments on the illustrations. In a short time a spontaneous (but of course the question remains how competent) textbook on the history of art useful for preparing for the exam. Direct contact with the monuments themselves and the scientific literature was replaced by virtual second hand information as the basis for perception.

The problem of the influence of the tourism and media revolutions on the relationship between individuals and groups to cultural property still needs careful research. In our milieu we do not have people sufficiently prepared scientifically to undertake in a competent manner such a study of such complex and ill-defined problems. Such an attempt might lead to dilettantism in the creation of judgments and opinions. But on the other hand we cannot refuse to notice the changes which are taking place around us and in ourselves and leave their analysis to others. We must undertake the effort, in accordance with our intellectual competences and practical experiences, to carefully examine the problem and draw conclusions for the future. It is on proper diagnosis and prognosis that the future of our discipline (which in the present interdisciplinary development we are increasingly frequently calling heritology). The shaping of public opinion, to which the theory and then the practice of research into and protection of cultural property must refer, is reliant on how present and future generations will perceive cultural

property, what kind of image of it they hold in their heads and hearts, and what feeling of responsibility it will evoke. This is why, together with ICCROM, our Theory Committee is proposing the participants of the present conference to take part in a discussion of the subject: **perception – image – responsibility.**

In order to discuss the present situation and draw conclusions about future developments, it may be helpful to take a retrospective look. We may consider the form of contact of man with historical monuments, both physical and intellectual. I would like to present a brief overview under three headings: tourism, media and responsibility.

## **Tourism**

Human civilisation developed through movement. Ever since man saddled a horse and discovered the wheel, there has been a progressive acceleration of human mobility. In western culture the Migration Period brought the oral culture of the barbarian world into direct contact with the great cultures of Greece and Rome. In this period we can perhaps see the beginnings of mass „cultural tourism“, and the results were of great significance for the future development of western culture. In the next two millennia, what may be seen as forms of „cultural tourism“ had many guises in the western world, conquests, crusades, pilgrimages the explorations of the discoverers of new lands and civilisations (America and the Far East) which then opened the road to colonialism and colonial “cultural tourism”. Modern tourism was born with the rediscovery of the greatness of the culture and art of antiquity. At first this was individual tourism, cultured people journeyed to Greece or Italy in order to read Homer, Horace or Vergil (of course in the original language) sitting amid the ruins of antiquity; other luminaries of the epoch followed in the footsteps of Goethe. The twentieth century saw the beginning of the era of mass tourism. Its beginnings go back to the period between the two World Wars. It was only after the Second World War that it was seen by small and big businesses as a potential source of huge profits.

Thus began the international tourist industry, which is today one of the most powerful and constantly developing branch of industry which (despite economic crises) still has great perspectives for future growth. This industry required great investment, the building of a massive logistic infrastructure and also in the permanent promotion of the product, showing the potential client ever more ‘newer’ tourist attractions. These concern not only comfortable conditions for accommodation and travel, but also new technical cognitive possibilities, from viewing complexes of historical buildings and cultural landscapes from the air, or penetrating underwater natural landscapes, for example. These magnificent prospects of great and unforgettable experiences and emotional effects of physical contact with the cultural property of different civilizations has however crossed a certain boundary. The historical monument has become in the mechanism of the tourism industry a commodity which needs to be sold to the consumer in the most attractive form. Thus we have an avalanche of aggressive restoration and the modernisation of historical monuments, their reconstruction, the creation of theatrical backdrops from urban interiors, the transformation of historical complexes into Disneyland with the total loss of their authenticity. Artificial constructions are sold to tourists as authentic monuments. This is a falsification of cultural property, creating in the tourist a false conviction that a historical monument must be complete and shining as new. This is at the same time a form of destruction of cultural property, which has been going on for many years, which we cannot control and which affects the most valuable of complexes of historic monuments, including World Heritage sites. Cultural tourism has become a double-edged sword.

## **Media**

Almost from the beginning of the mobile life of mankind the need developed to record the sights seen and pass them to others. Such a role was fulfilled by painting which perfected methods of showing the form of architecture, discovering the principles of perspective. The development of techniques of printing and graphic techniques allowing the multiplication of works of art played a huge role in the transmission of visual information about architectural monuments.

It is enough to recall the activities of Gianbattista Piranesi, whose engravings were the first mass media visual presentation of the architecture of Rome. At the same time the methods of measurement of buildings were improved together with methods of their presentation in the form of technical drawings (orthogonal projections) which were engraved and published in large editions in albums. This allowed the form and construction of historical monuments to be studied in detail, enabling architects to copy them in their own designs. The discovery of photography permitted an objective record of the visual appearance of a monument to be made. The development of film and then television brought the visual communication to the virtual sphere, giving us the illusion of being face to face with places, works of architecture and art which are geographically far away.

It was only however the rapid explosion of the development of techniques of electronic communication which has happened before our eyes in the past two decades and has revealed the true power of the media. Completely new possibilities have arisen for the computer simulation not only interactive three dimensional representations in virtual space of single monuments and complexes, but also their phases of development. Looking at our monitors we can follow the process of the alteration of a Romanesque basilica into a Gothic hallenkirche and then into a Baroque monastic complex. We can follow the phases of the creation of a painting from the underdrawing to the application of the varnish. This is a great didactic aid, allowing not only learning about the development of a historical monument, but also the logic of the changes taking place. To this we can add the possibilities of using the internet to obtain information, without the need to search for it in books or go to a library – all due to a small mouse which has even lost its tail. The fascination of the new possibilities for learning about the cultural property of the whole world by virtual means is so great that it leads in many cases to an addiction to the computer.

This raises questions however for our own milieu whether those pictures and information which our mouse gives us are in accord with our views on the need to educate society from even a young age in the spirit of respecting the authenticity of cultural property. Another question is whether and how we can influence the content and quality of the communications of the media. Indeed, what kind of influence we can have on that communication, and how we can participate in its creation? These are fundamental questions, and it is on the answer to them that the level of public responsibility for cultural property as cultural heritage depends.

Equally basic is the question concerning the relationship between the perception of cultural property through physical contact with it, and through its representation in virtual reality. Is there a conflict or symbiosis? It seems that direct perception, through various forms of tourism is increasingly becoming the passion of the older generation, now with a lengthened lifespan and free time, aware of the inevitability of death and desirous of seeing something more in their lifetime of the real beauty and richness of this world. The younger generation on the other hand, the 'net-generation', living in constant stress with less free time is fascinated by the possibilities of reaching it quickly and easy through the indirect means of virtual reality. What will happen by the middle of this century when the present young net-generation will have become pensioners? Being equipped with knowledge and virtual experience will they attempt to discover the joy of contact in the real world with cultural property, or will they sink even deeper into and shut themselves within their virtual world? We must be prepared for both possibilities.

## **Responsibility**

Humanity came a long way through the millennia until the moment when the concept of cultural heritage arose in enlightened minds, and then acquired a universal dimension above national, regional or cultural limitations. The beginnings and circumstances of the growth of an awareness of the historical value of works of architecture and art in individual cultural regions require more research.

In Europe these beginnings go back to the period of the Italian Renaissance where the humanists saw the values in the ruins of ancient, pagan, Rome as witnesses to a distant history. Together with increasingly better scientific study of ancient architecture and art, the theory was developed that only the artistic heritage of the ancient Greeks and Romans had attained absolute perfection, and only it deserved investigation and protection. In this sense (to use today's conceptual apparatus), the art of antiquity comprised the first common European cultural heritage, universal and international, making all European nations its heirs.

This extreme theory soon came into conflict with the growing modern national awareness of the European peoples seeking their own cultural roots. For nations living north of the Alps, without their own traditions going back to Antiquity, those roots were barbarian. The cult of universal antiquity gave way to the Romantic admiration for the culture and art of the Middle Ages. European art was seen anachronistically in terms of „national art“. The concept of a „national historical monument“ became the commonplace of nationalism, regarding a given antiquity as the sole preserve of a given nation as part of its history and culture.

Only at the beginning of the last century (with Alois Riegl) did the view appear that the protection of cultural property is a supra-national responsibility, the responsibility of all mankind. The regarding of the history of architecture and art in „national“ categories however has led to – and still leads to – great intellectual and material damage during military conflict when historical monuments (regarded as the „national art“ of the enemy) are destroyed with premeditation. Only the post-War period brought a breakthrough, together with the activities of UNESCO and the creation of the convention on the world

heritage of humanity. The introduction of that concept into the Convention was a bit of semantic manipulation, suggesting the equality of the concepts of cultural property and cultural heritage.

In fact there are a lot of differences between these two concepts. The notion of cultural property is apolitical and non-ideological. It is everything that past generations have left behind. Cultural heritage on the other hand is a matter of choice, acceptance and responsibility. It is constantly undergoing many ideological and political manipulations. Our task is encouraging conscious responsibility for the whole of humanity's cultural property as a common cultural heritage. A condition of this is learning about it and growing to love it in the whole of its richness of material and non-material values, whether through perception through direct contact or virtual reality. All roads lead to Rome. Will they meet and when?