Versión del texto en INGLÉS

Between a tribute and a pretext

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Abstract
A series of ideas from several publications by Françoise Choay will be grouped together in this paper. These may be sacrilegiously discussed and transferred to this world, only twenty years into the future; although it is an insignificant period of time, unfortunately it is long enough, in many cases, for conservation to have turned into a management of change. The thematic sequence starts from the approach regarding the city as heritage and the relatively recent concept of the search for resilience, focusing on the specificity of the value of the urban form. The discussion of this topic implies taking into consideration the integrity and authenticity of the attributes of the urban form and, therefore, of the relationship of the new with the old, with reference to shape and expression. Finally, it is worth reviewing a universal but very intense problem related to the specificities of authenticity in Latin America: pastiche and kitsch.

Keywords: urban heritage, integrity, authenticity, urban shape.

The opportunity to publish in *Conversaciones…* has permitted the author of this paper to reread Françoise Choay, and to continue learning from her while enjoying it, thanks to the overall perspective of her underlying method: the systemic vision with a non-linear structure, which makes it possible to relate all pertinent elements and, at the same time, to discuss each issue at length until an always welcome conclusion emerges. Such a method, incisive, deep, and often based on comparisons, gradually draws out themes that were not underlined at the time but that were visible, which can be generalized both because they can be possible, and because they can be transported to a later moment: the current moment in time.

Without wishing to attribute premonitions to Choay, the flexibility in her analysis allowed her to glimpse the future and, above all, to lay the foundations so that her considerations can be extrapolated to the present. That is why this work has focused on the selection and discussion of issues that she has addressed and that continue to be totally valid; therefore, it is a tribute but also a pretext to comment on current issues.

The city, an undeniable heritage
The fight has left the castles and it is now on the streets. The monument, memory or testimony, is not in danger, but both the neighborhood and the large city are in the sights of real estate and tourism developers.

Choay cites French officials who starkly and cruelly promoted (Choay, 2009: XL) the economic value of the heritage, and therefore deserved to be confronted by a barricade. On this side of the Atlantic, as early as 1967, the *Norms of Quito* (2009) recognized the economic possibility of the historic city, but with an approach where logic was predominant. By the way, with very

honorable exceptions (Sartor, 2009), this document is hardly mentioned in the historiography on heritage, although it was very useful for the discussions carried out during the drafting of the *Valletta Principles*.[1]

Currently, the recognition of heritage as an economic resource, when used responsibly, is shared by many specialists. Tourism, with its resorts, golf courses and cruise ships, is the antagonist. And the proposed solution is cultural tourism, as long as authenticity is not affected. But that is almost impossible, because from the moment tourists arrive at a site, the community balance changes.

The great contradiction lies in the fact that knowing the world is a necessity and a right of individuals, but likewise, communities have the right to protect what is theirs. Consequently, community tourism is probably the best solution. This somewhat recent concept has shown excellent results in relatively peripheral countries and neighborhoods, where the place and its spirit belong to the communities and where the fact that it has been launched to stardom, and therefore coveted by companies who are alien to the inhabitants of the heritage territory, has not yet reached them. It is there that the small companies and cooperatives can manage tourism activities and, therefore, there are many more possibilities to guarantee the authenticity of the physical interventions and of the traditional practices than when what dominates is purely global.

However, this can be contaminated at the city level by the common lack of knowledge and, above all, by voluntarism on the part of authorities and managers who approach the analysis of the city as a whole in a simplistic and even abstract manner. They see it from the outside or from a higher viewpoint, without getting to know the spatial, functional and cultural reality of the city.

Françoise Choay[2] provided the keys to urban analysis by characterizing with surgical precision the multiple approaches to urban vision, from utopias to current reality, displaying that unique ability to delve into the problem and not get carried away by apologies or diatribes.

The extraordinary, almost microscopic revision of urban models that she has undertaken brings several considerations to the present moment:

- The need to study the urban (functional) structure in parallel with the identification of the cultural value of the city. Often, when working on the historic city (and all cities are historic cities), we often think of the historic center and on how to protect it. But we do not act on the rest of the urban territory, which can have extraordinary values and be inhabited by many people identified with its cultural significance, but also with the functionality of everyday life.

- This problem is more frequent than it seems and is largely due to the traditional concept of the historic center, derived from the study of medieval cities, in which the city walls functioned as the precise boundary for what was significant. The area inside the walls exhibited so much concentrated value that, in many cases, the rest of the city was forgotten; therefore, even today, the historic center is protected but not its surroundings. These encompassing areas, which may be valuable, are assaulted with audacity, arguing that those actions are not illegal.

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[1] Prepared by the ICOMOS International Committee for Historic Cities, Towns and Villages for various years, and approved at ICOMOS 17th General Assembly in Paris, in 2011 [www.icomos.org].

[2] See Choay (1970).

- The relationship of the structure itself with resilience and governance, that is to say how the theoretical study of the model has been replaced by its adaptability, in the best case, or even by the lack of a model, can be dangerous, because the functional lack of control prevents the sustainability of the city.

Throughout history, there has been a lack of real compatibility between urban functional and socio-cultural models. In some cases, such as the models of urban structure described by authors as diverse as Lynch and the Soviet authors Bocharov and Kudriatsev, the level of abstraction was so high as to be inoperative in real cities. Others were less abstract but more harmful because they contained concrete proposals, such as Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin or Wiener and Sert's plan for Havana.

In the current difficult moment, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, urban and even territorial planning models have been proposed or revitalized, some of which are based on remembering that the principles of modern architecture and urban planning originated in response to the health problems that largely affected cities in the 19th and early 20th centuries, most notably the pandemic known as the Spanish Flu.

The models suggested today have as a common denominator the reduction of population density and of the coefficient of land occupation, but some go so far as to propose urban typologies, such as the superblock model, which could lead, if inserted in historic or traditional areas of the city, to the destruction of the urban heritage.

In short, despite the awareness of heritage and of the documents of international doctrine, approved by a large number of specialists, scientific courses and programs, the separation between the approach of urban planners and that of heritage conservators still persists. It is possible that the idea of the cultural significance of the city has been diluted within the great universe of the broadening of the concept of culture, which, despite the original good intentions, has caused the specific to be lost within the general and the heritage and the reference to identity to be incorporated into slogans, but insufficiently put into daily practice.

However, resilience in the contemporary large city requires the recognition of the significance of cultural and natural heritage, of symbols at any scale, which, from an economic and social point of view, can be summarized as follows: identifying urban values and intensifying or creating pride in everyone's city. Any analysis would include the recognition of multiculturalism, possible uprooting and even nostalgia.[3]

It is thus that such a current issue as resilience and the importance of communities has much to do with Choay's concepts as:

> But the past that is invoked and called forth, in an almost incantatory way, is not any past: it is localized and selected to a critical end, to the degree that it is capable of directly contributing to the maintenance and preservation of the identity of an ethnic, religious, national, tribal or familial community (Choay, 2001: 6).

An observation that, at the same time, contributes to the recognition that it is not only about the geographically defined community, but also about the possible multiplicity of communities, as would later be seen in the *Krakow Charter* (2000) and in the *Nara+20*

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[3] Presented by the author as "Resilience in the large city" during the Megalopolis event, representing ICOMOS' CIVVIH, in Puebla, Mexico, 24-27 July 2018.

document (ICOMOS, 2014). Community diversity, despite its obviousness, is one of the keys that identify the current reality and whose recognition in practice would really allow the achievement of a resilient city and a sustainable heritage.

"The progressive erasure of the memorial function of the monument" (Choay, 2001: 8) occurs and reveals itself over time but is exacerbated at times like the present when the crisis brings to the surface the battle for symbols. "Heritage is conflict, dissent, permanent tension"[4] (Nordenflycht, 2019: 5).

With the recognition of Kevin Lynch's ideas, Choay underlines the relationship of value assessment of the city by environmental psychology, which then becomes, in its method of analysis, the articulation of the "hard" disciplines that usually constitute the essence of urbanism, with the "artistic" disciplines that, on the other hand, are considered outdated or, at least, contrived. This recognition foreshadows the relatively recent concept of Historic Urban Landscape. In their key paper on HUL, Bandarin and Van Oers acknowledge and cite the significance of Choay's work in their approach with respect to the heritage values of the city itself as a starting point for the urban conservation approach (Bandarin and Van Oers, 2012).

It is not often that the official documents of the institutions that work on urban planning recognize the importance of urban heritage and even less the urban form in the management of the city,[5] but when we currently talk about urban resilience, one of the strengths that comes to the forefront is the significance of the population settlement for its inhabitants, the question of identity and, therefore, heritage. I consider that the great contribution of the concept of historic urban landscape, which in other aspects had not surpassed the *Valletta Principles*, was the recognition of the urban heritage value given not only by the historicity or by the accumulation of monuments, but also by the urban shape, by taking into account "perceptions and visual relations" (UNESCO, 2011: 62).

Beyond rescue and forgiveness: Choay and Sitte

On this subject, dealt with several times by Choay, it should be noted that Camilo Sitte serves as a basis for her to point out the contradiction between the historical city and the designed city. This continues to be latent, although nuanced in light and shadow, such as the fact that the latter's guiding principle was urban aesthetics, and not the entire set of factors that govern and model the city. It could be hypothesized that Sitte's overly architectural position influenced, by opposition, the excessively technical approach of many Latin American architects who, admirers of the urban plans of Le Corbusier and José Luis Sert, adhered for years to the principles of rationalism and, therefore, of zoning. I recall the criticisms of Sitte in the History of Architecture and Urbanism classes taught by Roberto Segre, who had an important influence on Latin American schools of architecture.

Starting from the analysis of modern critics of Sitte, the author gave the key of how to save the city from abstraction, when she expressed:

> The mental climate of this model is reassuring, comfortable and stimulating at the same time; favorable to the intensity of interpersonal relationships, even if, as in the case of Sitte, everything is resolutely sacrificed to pure aesthetics, understood in the vitalist sense given by Ruskin and Morris[6] (Choay, 1970: 57).

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[4] Original quotation: "El patrimonio es conflicto, disenso, tensión permanente".

[5] See Hosagrahar, Soule, Fusco Girard and Potts (2016).

[6] Original quotation: "El clima mental de este modelo es tranquilizador, cómodo y estimulante a la vez; favorable a la intensidad de las relaciones interpersonales, incluso si, como en el caso de Sitte, se sacrifica resueltamente todo a la pura estética, entendida ésta en el sentido vitalista que le dan Ruskin y Morris".

The mention of the artistic dimension alone does not deprive her of mentioning Sitte's very important contribution to the assessment of urban significance, which, combined with the indispensable work of Jane Jacobs and others, allows her to make a devastating critique of zoning.

Continuity, communication and value in urban space

Years later, Ricardo Porro would propose the "urbanism of communication" based on the continuity of space and its meaning as a connection, not in the building as an independent entity. This idea had been the basis for the project of the National Art Schools of Havana[7]: "I also wanted the school to be a city... (influence of Venice?). Everything is organized in urban spaces that culminate in the plaza" (Porro, 1999: 24) (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. THE URBANISM OF COMMUNICATION. Street of Los Oficios and the plaza de San Francisco. Old Havana. *Image: Ángela Rojas.*

In the urban experience, it is worth remembering that, in defining the values of the city, some experts have abused considering them as sum of the parts, that is, from the identification of the value of each monument and the historicity derived from the evolution of the city. The form and the urban environment are included in some descriptions but they do not appear clearly in most inventories.

If the Latin American case is analyzed, practically only the historic centers of the Colonial period are inscribed on the World Heritage List, which creates, over time, an undervaluation of the rest of the city that detracts from the priority of its management and can lead to abandonment. It is the foundational process that is recognized as the most significant, which, with the exceptions of Valparaíso, Sewell and Brasilia, leaves out other important historical processes that occurred in the Americas.

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[7] Ricardo Porro, Vittorio Garatti y Roberto Gottardi, 1961-1965.

This situation both reflects and underscores the problem of representativeness on the World Heritage List, as it excludes very important sub-categories that respond to the particularities of the region. Missing, for example, are the cities of the Independence, the workers' towns, the beaches –so closely linked to the Latin American identity– the garden cities, and, of course, the elements that identify Latin American metropolises, with their extensions or "ensanches" and monumental symbols.

But it is not only the continuity of space or the multiple historicities of cities. Françoise Choay's understanding of the elements of urban design, which has been enriched to the present day, is the cornerstone of urban aesthetics and therefore of an urban value independent, to a certain extent, of historicity. It underlines the enormous importance of the basic design elements, necessarily used because, otherwise, it would be impossible to design, but insufficiently recognized today. And its importance, above all, is found in the intervention in heritage sites. But she goes much further when she states "the problem of urban morphology in terms of meanings"[8] (Choay, 1970: 94).

On the new and the old
The spatial interface of the old and the new, if harmonious and coherent, would validate Viollet-Le-Duc's position celebrated by Choay: historiography demystified and free of dogmatism. The interesting thing about this matter is that the coexistence of the new with the old in the urban form has notable examples in history in which it occurs not as an antithesis but as a qualitative leap to a new entity that surpasses the previous one.

There are many historical examples such as the spatial and symbolic articulation of Rome, from Sixtus V onwards, passing through Baroque Paris and the intervention, analyzed by Françoise Choay, of Haussmann's plan. In all these cases, the city became another one. However, differences should be mentioned: the obelisks, symbolic landmarks that foreshadowed in Rome what would become Lynch's landmarks, functioned as visual guides to spirituality, but they did not transform space nor use until much later. In other words, Sixtus V's plan is limited to a change of legibility, while Haussmann's intervention transforms the city, in a physical, structural and social manner. Perhaps the elegant and minimalist intervention of Joseph Plecnik in Ljubljana is one of the best examples of visual transformation of a city without attacking its fabric, in a personal "prequel" of what more than a decade later would be learned from environmental psychologists.

When Choay analyzes San Francisco, California, she highlights the problems of the grid imposed on a territory whose relief required a freer treatment, which suggests that there was something of stubbornness and fashion. However, history, as it sometimes does, turned the technical error into one of the most important features of the spirit of the city. The idea of the streetcars is still an example of a sustainable solution, which in time became one of the symbols of identity. In San Francisco, the sloping streets provide spectacular views, which also occurs in other cases such as Santiago de Cuba, where the slope of the roads is incorporated not only for the visual enjoyment but also to the link with the immaterial, as privileged spaces for the carnival (Figure 2).

The grid, in spite of having been much studied, has, however, due to its extraordinary variety and antiquity, many possibilities for analysis. Latin American cities, the true protagonists of the Renaissance ideal and the Enlightenment, show complex and sometimes inoperative evolutions, but their layout also constitutes one of the main guarantees of the permanence of the urban value (Figure 3).

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[8] Original quotation: "el problema de la morfología urbana en términos de significaciones".

FIGURE 2. AN INCLINED STREET SEEN FROM THE VELÁZQUEZ BALCONY, SANTIAGO DE CUBA.
Image: Ángela Rojas.

FIGURE 3. MATANZAS, CUBA. The urban grid as an attribute that conveys values. *Image: Ángela Rojas.*

The permanence of the urban fabric is often considered as one of the attributes of value in historic cities, but pretending to preserve an unaltered urban fabric leads to a lack of authenticity, if not of the material, of the function, but acting disrespectfully through contemporary design can affect the integrity. It is therefore a matter of the new-old relationship, but not in terms of the building itself or with its surroundings, but between the new city and the old, but overlapping.

In "Alegoría del patrimonio" (Choay, 1993: 70), the author gives a positive judgment on I.M. Pei's intervention in the Louvre Museum, based on the character of living heritage, and she highlights the formal principle –being part of the Louvre-Tuileries axis as the attribute that allows the harmony of the pyramids–, despite the opacity of the largest one. She is absolutely right, although Pedro Ramirez Vazquez's proposal was much more elegant and discreet.

At the time of the extension of the Louvre Museum, the acceptance of new interventions on valuable sites was not unanimously accepted, despite the resolution of the 3rd General Assembly of ICOMOS, held in Budapest in 1972, in which the acceptance of contemporary architecture in the historic city is recorded. As important as the text of the resolution is the fact that the great protagonist was the project by Bela Pinter for the Hilton Hotel, one of the pioneers, unfortunately little known, of the trend that claimed what had happened throughout history: the harmony of the new with the old.

Achieving quality interventions depends to a large extent on understanding the value of the city, town or landscape, as well as the hierarchy of value-bearing attributes and a clear understanding of their characteristics. This gives rise to alternative approaches, ranging from maximum contrast to minimum intervention and varying degrees of harmony. Pei's work in the Louvre was a kind of trigger for authorial architecture to go from being an independent monument to becoming, as a parasite of the historical monument, the intended new monument.

The recognition of the economic value of the heritage city gave as a negative result an opportunistic attitude that went from the demolitions of the urban fabric characteristic of the decades from the 1950's to the 1980's, to noisily intervene in the most significant points of the city and even on the monuments themselves. In other words, the monument or the valuable place is taken as a pretext to build a hotel or any other type of symbol-building.

The current attitude of many mediocre business-related architects seeks spectacular designs, similar to those of starchitecture,[9] that is, those designed by the stars of the global architectural firmament. There are cases in which the international repertoire that inspires them is based on works such as the Hearst Tower (Norman Foster, 2006) in New York, for Old Havana, or Heron City, in the anonymous periphery of Madrid, as the target image for Varadero.

In a previous article (Rojas, 2013), I expressed the opinion that there is a big difference when it comes to interventions for a specific area, based on its analysis, and when the new intervention is strongly linked to a larger area, mainly if it is related to the city as a whole.

In the case of insertions in valuable contexts, the expressive load of the new building should be a function of the significance of the site. Rather than a contemporary dramatic reinterpretation, simple discretion. Often it is not only a problem of harmony, but of significance, and, above all, to think not only of the surrounding buildings but of the role that the new architecture plays in the urban discourse and to consider the significant places in the city, where changes or articulations of the fabric occur, in areas that need to be completed.

From pastiche to kitsch, and its birthright

The pastiches[10] and replicas constitute another dimension of the problem, not necessarily linked to tourism or to the big companies, and much more complex than it seems because

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[9] Term coined by D. Mcneill in "In search of the global architect: the case of Norman Foster and Partners", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (3), 501-515, cited by Knox, (2012).

[10] See Choay (2009: XLII).

even the first examples of copies to be happily enjoyed have acquired value by even becoming a style. The paradigmatic example would be the American neo-Colonial style, whose origin is attributed by some to the fascination with the novel *Ramona*, and which spread throughout the Americas but also in Asia and Europe. In this case it is not a historicist style like the neo-Gothic or neoclassical of the 20th century, assumed with veneration, but something inspired by a culture already transformed from the European ideal when it was transplanted to America, but identified with the world of novels, music and even cinema (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. NEO-COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE IN HAVANA. Industrial Technical Institute, Govantes and Cabarrocas, 1929.
Image: Ángela Rojas.

That is to say, neo-Colonial architecture is already legitimized in the countries where it is found, even though it has not been included in most books on the History of Architecture. Perhaps the approving factor is the fact that, without being the revered architecture of the Colonial period, it is authenticated as its joyful inheritance.

The real pastiches are those that to a great extent ridicule the replica, because of the materials used, the dimensions and proportions, the folkloristic attitude, all of which gives rise to the typical *kitsch*, above all, of the Caribbean area, that is, what Roberto Segre called: "the architecture of unsatisfied desires"[11] (Segre, 1990: 411).

Las Vegas and Disneyland are cases apart that owe their value to uniqueness. The former transcended in theory by acquiring very high significance in a way of reading urban space,[12] which was one of the precedents of Postmodernism and gave rise to a popular but unbridled imagination that, at the same time, underlines its exceptional character. Disneyland is a dream world that belongs more to nostalgia and the immaterial, and therefore has value in itself.

What could be considered pastiche or kitsch will depend on the culture to which it belongs, not on the antiquity or values, to a certain extent imported. In the excellent study carried out in the United States regarding gaps in the World Heritage List,[13] the first Hollywood studios and Disneyland, among others, were considered as examples of entertainment, while Cuba, for its part, has considered the Tropicana Cabaret, a National Monument since 2002, for possible inclusion in the Tentative List. In other words, the value given to these places is supported by an understanding of their significance within the contribution of a specific culture to the rest of the world.

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[11] Original quotation: "la arquitectura de apetencias insatisfechas".

[12] See Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour (1972).

[13] See US/ICOMOS (2016).

Legitimization or heritagization?

The criticism of pastiche and to the management mechanisms has a lot to do with the identities of different communities, with taste, appreciation, and symbolic ownership, to which we should add the problem of the evolution of heritage sensitivity. "Who will judge, whose tastes will matter?" (Sheer and Preiser, 1994: 4), the authors asked themselves in a study on aesthetic evaluation in Urbanism, to which they responded with the frequent recognition of the limits of objectivity. The same happens with heritization, a word with a certain aftertaste of cynicism but which better describes the behind-the-scenes of the current situation than legitimization, which is closer to objectivity and less to subterfuge.

Over time, community changes have become more complex, due to migration and other demographic or social causes. The difference between integration and assimilation, so much discussed today, also affects the perception of heritage: how to appropriate the new culture? How to maintain the existing one? Can hybrid cultures have a value of their own? In many cases, the attempt at integration can turn into a manipulation of the codes of the original culture, which, in terms of material and cultural practices in general, can give rise to a pastiche or, over time and with time and rootedness, to a more elaborate and ultimately authentic kitsch.

On the other hand, the obsessive search for cultural identity as a tourist attraction leads to a lack of authenticity and can lead to a false heritagization, especially in the field of the intangible, such as the supposed aboriginal rites in many Latin American countries that have even "invented" descendants of ancient civilizations, some of which have already disappeared. And in the city, the real use slowly transforms the existing with the new forms of life, generally without ruptures. There are times when everyday practices become symbols of new identities.

In closing…

The current situation, largely a consequence of the phenomena described and discussed by Françoise Choay, is getting worse and worse. In spite of this, the method she unveiled has provided analytical tools that not only remain valid, but have become essential. Reality is frightening, but the answers are to be found in it. Perhaps we have not yet arrived at a definitive concept of heritage, because the richness of life will continue to change it, enriching it.

The traditional Latin American neighborhoods present, to those who look at them from the top of a tower or an airplane, a fifth façade: the rooftop incorporated into daily life, with clotheslines, animal breeding grounds, bars and improvised viewpoints, which are often filled with buildings on the verge of collapse, but which seem to smile at their triumph over legality. In Havana, the flat roofs of neoclassical and eclectic architecture are the worst sight of the city, which takes its revenge on those who, out of early snobbery, preferred the alien model to the old-fashioned roof that responded organically to the aggressive tropical climate.

But at the same time, that apparently sad fifth façade is, despite the deterioration and visual chaos, a space for endearing daily practices, such as pigeon breeding. Those ugly dovecotes, threatened by hurricanes, appear in movies and soap operas and have already gained a discreet and sweet identity value. Should we "fight against them or fight for them?"

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