NEW HERITAGES AND THE SPIRIT OF THE CONSTITUTION

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When, in 1947, the Italian Constituent Assembly addressed the problem of the new Republic historical and artistic heritage, the statement that the State should have, among its founding principles, its protection of these precious and problematic assets was not at all obvious. It was believed, in fact, that it would not have been useful to indicate something so obvious. As if one were indicating, stated the Christian Democrat Edoardo Clerici, "that in our country we speak Italian". And yet, the founding fathers acted wisely, as even naming things is a choice and in the post-fascist Italy of the time, the statement took on a particular meaning. The principle of attributing to the entire Republic (not to local authorities, provinces, regions) the task of its care, highlighted the idea of a common right, of a shared good placed above any geographical and political affiliation.

The Republic, states art. 9 of the Constitution, protects the landscape and the historical and artistic heritage of the Nation "also in the interest of future generations". Another statement that is only apparently obvious. It tells us that the idea of cultural heritage is also the common thread that holds together in memory the events of history, giving them meaning and continuity.

But, in its general terms, it constitutes above all a choice and a project. It contains an idea of the future. The idea of heritage cannot be separated, in other words, from a general vision that explains those choices. Demonstrating why, for example, in a monument the ancient substrata are more important, as was believed in many restorations of the 1920s, than the stratifications that transformed them, in material and meaning, over the centuries. The very notion of historical heritage, the process of its mutations over time, its connections with the changing values that generated it, is itself a precious immaterial legacy.

Heritage is also a great synthesis that gives ever new meanings to cultural phenomena formed, in their historical development, from a set of differences.

It is, for this reason, also the transmission of a footprint, an identity left even to those who do not want or rebel against it. As in the autobiographical story by Philip Roth (*Heritage, a true story*, 1997) in which the author accompanies his sick father on his final journey towards death and slowly realizes that the distance he had tried to put between himself and his parent is shortening, that what remains as a legacy, in the substratum of Jewish Newark of those years, is a common identity that, long rejected, now becomes an involuntary and undeserved regeneration, a legacy in the fullest sense. This driving force function that cultural heritage possesses thus explains the character of modern post-war Italy, of the many architects who have grasped the spirit of the times and the essence of internationalism that was at its heart, and who nevertheless could not fail to possess, as Nikolaus Pevsner had noted, the inevitable legacy of having lived within the inherited beauty, of having unwittingly nourished, even in the dark periods of their history, the eye and mind of exemplary episodes that intelligence will eventually synthesize.

For this reason, the idea that there is a universal cultural heritage constitutes one of the many, casual contemporary myths, now in crisis in the period of post-globalization. In reality, the very idea of heritage and the interpretations it provides are the product of a specific context, of a community settled in a place and consolidated over time.

But patrimony is also a powerful set of legal relationships that concern properties and things owned, the holders and the set of goods intended to satisfy their needs.

It is necessary to take into account the centrality of the principles that regulate these relationships as the structure of the protection operations is, at bottom, political and economic. And so, we ask ourselves: how can we save the heritage of our historic centres when entire cities are dominated by the laws of an uncontrolled free market that dictates the rules, in which tourism has become an industry that claims the dominion of shared spaces. Article 42 of the Constitution, which places limits on private property to ensure that goods have their social function by making them

"accessible to all", is a relic of the past. Is there any hope when this condition seems accepted (even by many architects) as an authentic product of modernity, against the nostalgics, it is argued, who would like to stop the unstoppable flow of time? There is no doubt that historic spaces must deal, today, with the dissonances of a torn world that translate into conflicts between opposing values and interests. These lacerations are particularly painful in historic Italian cities where everything (buildings, building complexes, routes) is organically linked in a solidary relationship of necessity. The ancient morality of this relationship makes every element that belongs to the past appear positive and good, on which the generous spirit of conservation ends up focusing. But every monument, every historic settlement is saved not so much if it is protected as an object but if it survives, modifying and adapting, the relationship of their particular with the multiple, of the part with the entire organism.

How this bond is rapidly breaking amidst the general disinterest of politics is clear for all to see: all historic housing (base building) is specializing without the phenomenon being perceptible through obvious architectural transformations. The protection of the facades thus becomes the anaesthetic that masks the ongoing conflict. Which has assumed frightening proportions. In ten years, from December 2013 to December 2023, the inhabitants of the Rome historic centre have decreased by 38%, with neighbourhoods, such as Trastevere, in which the population of residents has halved. While heritage seems increasingly perceived as set of images, backgrounds multiplied by Instagram and Facebook.

Perhaps we should remember something obvious: heritage is above all a provisional and choral truth. Not an assembly of fragments, but a whole composed of apparently autonomous parts that, however, are linked to express what we elect as our past, together with our (ethical) idea of the future. It is a concrete and vital act. Deriving from the real things we give importance to, it is the tangible representation of our values. Even, in my opinion, in the age of social media.