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Original
Carnet de voyage: A Ruskin's legacy on capture and transmission the architectural travel experience / Londono-Venegas, Sasha. - In: RESTAURO ARCHEOLOGICO. - ISSN 1724-9686. - 2:(2019), pp. 192-197.

Availability:
This version is available at: 11583/2911044 since: 2021-07-05T18:03:18Z

Publisher:
Firenze University Press

Published
DOI:

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12 October 2024

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restauro archeologico

Conoscenza, conservazione e valorizzazione del patrimonio architettonico
Rivista del Dipartimento di Architettura dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze

Knowledge, preservation and enhancement of architectural heritage
Journal of the Department of Architecture University of Florence

Memories on John Ruskin
Unto this last
special issue

2019

2

Poste Italiane spa - Tassa pagata - Piego di libro Aut. n. 072/DCB/FI1/VF del 31.03.2005

FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Memories on John Ruskin

UNTO THIS LAST

a cura di

SUSANNA CACCIA GHERARDINI
MARCO PRETELLI

RA | restauro archeologico

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Knowledge, preservation and enhancement of architectural heritage
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Anno XXVII special issue/2019
Registrazione Tribunale di Firenze
n. 5313 del 15.12.2003

ISSN 1724-9686 (print)
ISSN 2465-2377 (online)

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Cover photo
John Ruskin, *Column bases, doorway of Badia, Fiesole*. 1874.
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graphic design
didacommunicationlab
DIDA Dipartimento di Architettura
Università degli Studi di Firenze
via della Mattonaia, 8
50121 Firenze, Italy

published by
Firenze University Press
Università degli Studi di Firenze
Firenze University Press
Via Cittadella, 7 - 50144 Firenze, Italy
www.fupress.com

Stampato su carta di pura cellulosa *Fedrigoni*

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Carnet de voyage: A Ruskin's legacy on capture and transmission the architectural travel experience

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Abstract
*Travel notebook (*carnet de voyage*) is one of the most invaluable legacies of Ruskin from the didactic and formative point of view of architecture. It has remained the preferred medium by which architectural experiences are gathered into memoirs, subsequently finding their way into projects. Travel experiences captured in notebooks are made up by references that have a strong and important impact on the architectural training. This Ruskin's legacy gives the opportunity to study how architects learn to observe geographic, chromatic, pictorial, perceptual, and sensory phenomena. Collecting experiences and references in a* carnet de voyage *also involves reflections and analysis of the sites visited, where architects produce an instrument of knowledge for composition, conceptualization and critical reflection, and the learning of architecture today. Through the notebooks of the first formation travels of an English gentleman, it is possible to achieve a lesson of democratization of the journey as it is expanded and diffused for those who possibly do not have the possibility to travel in the same way.*

Parole chiave
Architecture, carnet-de-voyage, formative-travel, travel-notebooks

Il taccuino è un sistema di memoria [...] non solo un deposito disordinato di frammenti di memoria[1].

How are travel notebooks an invaluable legacy of John Ruskin for the education of architecture? How are travel experiences and references captured in travel notebooks, restored and reinstituted in the architectural project? How are the travel notebooks used in the process of design and research in architecture? How does their study contribute to knowledge?[2] This contribution is part of an ongoing doctoral research, which seeks to give value to the concept of the architect's first formative travel and its restitution in the project and learning of architecture, conceived travel notebooks as a fundamental instrument for the capture and transmission of the journey.
The relevance of the first educational travel is determinant in the architect's training and structuring for subsequent journeys. Likewise, the travel notebook has been for years the medium through which the journey can be recorded and/or transmitted. For architects, have remained the preferred and most effective medium for capturing

references, and building a memoir that finds its return in architectural projects and its apprenticeship. How are references captured in travel notebooks? How are these references activated and dynamized in the design and research process? How can personal language and personal experience become a collective domain through architectural design (theoretical, practical and pedagogical)? The doctoral research studies the first formative journey of the Colombian architect Germán Samper (1924-2019)[3], in Italy (1949), and the way to capture the memoirs of the journey in notebooks. How does he receive the legacy and influence of Ruskin? is it reflected in his travel notebooks? It is proposed to construct a theoretical framework through the critical analysis of the notebooks of the first travel considered as a fundamental pedagogical tool. This analysis examines the transmission of a travel model, supported by a more general learning model, analyzed through a comparative case study in a maestro-*allievo* succession: Paul Bouvier (1857-1940), Charles L'Eplattenier (1874-1946), Le Corbusier (1887-1965), Germán Samper (1924-2019) and their formative travels that, such as Ruskin, took place in Italy (1879, 1900, 1907, 1949, respectively). This research proposes an approach to understand the role of references in architectural training as a system and method of learning from two points of view: the references collected in the travel notebooks and the master's formative travel of the master as a reference for the pupil. It assesses the travel as a model, and studies the reiterative elements in it, focusing on the importance of the formative travel both in the stage of composition as well as a didactical tool.

The first formative journey implies the first impact, impression and direct experience with another unknown space, which is stirring and irreplaceable, but also because the own travel's capture is made attentively and consciously. Through time and repetition, it becomes a practice that is polished and reinforced in each new journey. Afterwards each time will be different, but the imprint of the first impression is indelibly engraved and impregnated in memories (remembrance, mind, emotion).

«I successivi viaggi, fino all'ultimo di 1888, pur spaziando dalla Sicilia alla Venezia, non hanno al contrario [...] la freschezza e l'interesse dei suoi primi incontri con il "Bel Paese", ultimo esempio del "Grand Tour" così caro all'educazione dell'uper class inglese»[4].

Despite not having an architect's degree, since the publication in 1849 of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*; in 1851 *The Stones of Venice, The Elements of Drawing* in 1857, *Mornings in Florence* in 1875, *The Laws of Fiesole* and *St. Mark's Rest* in 1877, Ruskin has meant an important point of reference for architects and artists. His publications are composed of his personal letters, reflections on art, architecture, inhabitants and cities, he describes them, while providing his personal opinion based on his theories and concepts; in addition, of his drawings, sketches and watercolours, which are graphic representations based on a critical-analytical vision. With his sharp observations and criticisms, he directs those who read him, instructs them, guides them, offers them descriptive narrations that he complements with drawings: complete testimonies of travel notebooks. Ruskin's voyages to Italy, collected in his notebooks, mean a formative travel guide, a kind of artistic and architectural itinerary through cities. To follow him is a very intimate and personal decision, and despite any possible contradictions, it is almost inevitable not to be a reference for architects before, during, after, or even in replacement of their own physical travel. *Mornings in Florence* becomes for many «un libro didattico e appassionato a un tempo [...]»[5] that opens the path for the physical and also ideal journey of its readers.

> Ruskin saw things with an extraordinary clarity of perception [...] it was his ability to comprehend visual phenomena that gave him a special position as an analyst. Writing in an elaborate rhetorical style, he was frequently carried away by his emotions [...][6].

In the specific case study Bouvier[7], L'Eplattenier[8], Le Corbusier[9], Samper, Ruskin was a model to follow through his travel notebooks, studied before and during their respective training journeys to Italy. It is worth noting that a very interesting dualism is created between a more pictorial interest in sensation, perspective, watercolour and all the sensitivity that this implies, as opposed to a more practical and technical interest, for example, represented by Viollet-Le-Duc, who was more interested in constructive details and technique when drawing. Although this interesting dualism that emerges in 1800, it is interesting to observe that it implied two types of thought and representation that meant two very strong models for architects. It is probable that Le Corbusier is one of those who makes these dualities converge in an impeccable way. The legacy Ruskin left on Le Corbusier in his early years of formation, is probably one of the most studied and evidenced.

> Jeanneret's sketchbooks are a testimony to Ruskin's philosophy and, as he developed his architectural philosophy, the foundation laid in these early years-maintained Ruskin's view [...][10].

Scholars and academics such as P. Turner (1977), P. Sekler (1977), G. Baker (1996), A. Brooks (1997), S. Von Moos, A. Rüegg (2002), are essentially concerned with these first years of formation, and achieve deep and interesting relationships, revealing Ruskin's influence on Jeanneret. His first approach to Ruskin was through his master L'Eplattenier; the influence that Ruskin exerted on his training is undeniable. In the period before and during the trip to Italy in 1907[11], two books motivated him: *Mornings in Florence* and *Seven lamps of architecture*.

> [...] Jeanneret found his analyses of nature, painting and sculpture inspirational (on his first trip to Italy he took with him Ruskin's Mornings in Florence)[12], and he came to rely on Ruskin for information on the techniques involved in drawing and painting [...] drew from Ruskin, even on occasions borrowing his literary style[13].

On the other hand, the great influence Ruskin exerted on L'Eplattenier, makes this architect a key figure to the research.

> While L'Eplattenier does not seem to have been especially open to the ideas of Viollet-le-Duc, he admires Ruskin profoundly and passed that enthusiasm on to his student[14].
> The significance of Ruskin and Owen Jones to L'Eplattenier and his students lay in the fact that their writings explained those principles of design that could be extended from a study of nature [...] L'Eplattenier held Ruskin in the highest regard, almost certainly because of the comprehensive theoretical base and sound training in technique provided by such works as The Seven lamps of Architecture, Stones of Venice, The Elements of Drawing and Modern Painters [...] his particular view owed much to the writings of Ruskin and Owen Jones, and both the philosophical standpoint and the techniques advocated by these writers contributed to his own thinking and to his teaching strategy[15].

Perhaps less studied is the link Ruskin-Bouvier and Ruskin-Samper. Ruskin's influence on Bouvier may not be so clear; however, given Bouvier's passion for watercolor, it is highly likely that Ruskin has passed through his hands, as may have Turner or Tintoretto[16]. Bouvier was born in 1857, while Ruskin (38 years old) published *The Elements of Drawing* and catalogued the drawings Turner had left to the National Gallery. In

1873 Ruskin published 10 lectures on Tuscany, while Bouvier began his apprenticeship as an architect. In 1875 while Ruskin began the publication of *Mornings in Florence*, Bouvier signed his first watercolors and after three years, entered the *ENSBA* (Paris). In 1879 Bouvier (22 years old) attended courses in aesthetics and art history by Ch. Blanc and H. Taine, and undertook his first trip to Italy, from which he produced beautiful watercolors exhibited in 1882. In 1884, while giving his first art critique to the Swiss liberal newspaper, Ruskin gave up lecturing. Bouvier completed his training as an architect in 1886; in 1888, while Ruskin made his last trip to Europe, he travelled to Tunisia, and produced 130 canvases.

Germán Samper is one of 22 Latin Americans who worked at Le Corbusier's atelier (1949-1954). After helping him organize CIAM VII in Bergamo (1949), undertook his first training travel to Italy. Le Corbusier suggested an itinerary and some recommendations: the main one was to leave the photo camera and take a pocket travel notebook to draw. To accompany the drawing, he suggested to make notes[17], mark them with date, place and signature, and not give any as a gift. Even without knowing his master's travel notebooks, Le Corbusier transmitted in a few words what would be for Samper, as he later asserted, the best and most important lesson of his life: to draw and thus to learn architecture. From this first travel arose 2 notebooks of drawings and reflections that are currently in process of analysis. Later on, when he offered to organize his master's library, discovered Ruskin books and glimpsed the possible origin of his best lesson.

Ruskin impacts them in two different ways: on the initial approach to architecture on the training travel to Italy, and on the techniques of direct observation and drawing, as a result of a learning method. Ruskin's lessons and concepts, such as reduction of complexity in essence, compositional harmony and associative imagination, were transmitted to suggest their own theoretical and practical approaches, as well as the comprehension of nature art or architecture through the relationship eye-hand-mind «the drawing [...] certain in their intention and clear in explanation»[18]. Ruskin represents for these architects an important figure used in itself as a reference, and his travel notebooks are an invaluable legacy from the didactic and formative point of view of architecture.

Ruskin's legacy goes beyond the tangible and the visible, becoming vital lessons. Besides suggesting how to draw and to provide pictorial and constructive techniques[19], he encourages staying patiently long enough in a place to observe attentively, sensitivity and consciousness to achieve representations that transmit, rather than reality, the impressions and emotions generated by that reality[20]. This is how he achieves a theory of design, developing techniques of observation and analysis. This implies the formation of critical, analytical, deductive and constructive thought. Architecture is learned rather than taught and its apprenticeship depends on one's context and personal life experience. The legacy finally consists in taking what is useful and building on one's own knowledge. Ruskin encourages repeated itineraries, but perhaps the most important part of his legacy is not his delightful drawings or watercolors or his magnificent descriptive-analytical texts; is its symbolic value: the possibility that the travel notebooks could be reproduced and thus transmitted to others.

The travel notebook is in itself also the possibility of democratizing the journey. This could be a paradox, being Ruskin, an English gentleman, well affluent, with no financial problems, with the possibility of traveling for a long time, like few others at that

time and nowadays, and without any other concerns than those of approaching the observation and study of art and architecture, the same who made possible the transmission and reproduction of the journey through his notebooks. Thanks to their publications, which already began in the late 1800s, Ruskin's formative travels in Italy have continued to serve as a guide and reference for many architects. Through this legacy, his itinerary expanded and it was possible for him to reach both: those who could physically reproduce the journey and those who, despite being unable to travel physically, made their own virtual journey through Ruskin's travel notebooks.

This paper argues that the pedagogical aspects of the architectural voyage imply its understanding as a didactic experience; a formative instrument. Its restitution, written or drawn, is the role of travel notebooks as Ruskin masterfully taught. The travel notebook as a representative, important and significant element to transmit the journey, besides representing an invaluable aesthetic legacy, manages, with its publication, to emerge what might seem an unimaginable paradox: through Ruskin's travel notebooks, this formative journey is democratized and, surely, is related to his positions on ethics and morality.

[1] R. Palma, «*Laisser cette page blanche*», Frammenti per una teoria del taccuino 2002.
[2] B. Pedretti «[...] nei quaderni, negli abbozzi o negli appunti [...] non sappiamo *ancora* a cosa ci condurrà il processo di conoscenza che affidiamo loro». «[...] nei quaderni, negli abbozzi o negli appunti [...] non sappiamo *ancora* a cosa ci condurrà il processo di conoscenza che affidiamo loro», *La forma dell'incompiuto. Quaderno, abbozzo e frammento come opera del moderno*, Novara, De Agostini 2007, p.5, 14.
[3] Germán Samper (1924-2019), Colombian modern architect, was one of the 22 Latin Americans who worked in Le Corbusier's atelier between 1932-1965 and the last still alive until May 2019.
[4] J. Ruskin, *Viaggi in Italia (1840-1845)*, edited by A. Brilli, Firenze, Passigli 2018, p. 5.
[5] A. Rossatti, *Introduzione*, in J. Ruskin, *Mattinate Fiorentine*, edited by A. Rossatti, Milano, BUR Rizzoli 2017, p. 5.
[6] G. H. Baker, *Le Corbusier. The Creative Search*, New York, Chapman & Hall, Van Nostrand Reinhold 1996, p. 15.
[7] About P. Bouvier: see P. Allanfrancini, *Paul Bouvier, Aquarelliste, Architecte (1857-1940)*, in *Biographies Neuchâteloises*, Tome 3, De La Révolution Au Cap Du XXe Siécle, Hauterive, Gilles Attinger 2001; Id., *Paul Bouvier*, Hauterive, Gilles Attinger 2009.
[8] About Ch. L'Eplattenier see A. Hellmann, *Charles L'Eplattenier. Artiste et Pédagogue (1874-1946)*, in *Biographies Neuchâteloises*, Tome 4, 1900-1950, Hauterive, Gilles Attinger 2005.
[9] G. Gresleri, «Poco prima della partenza per l'Italia Jeanneret aveva acquistato e letto i due volumi del *Voyage d'Italie* di H. Taine e *Les matins à Florence* di J. Ruskin già disponibile nell'edizione francese nel 1907. È a questi testi – conservati nella sua biblioteca – che egli fa spesso riferimento confrontando le "scoperte" personali con le descrizioni contenute nelle celebri opere». G. Gresleri, *Le Corbusier, Il Viaggio in Toscana (1907)*, Venezia, Marsilio 1987.
[10] G.H. Baker, *Le Corbusier...* cit., p. 57.
[11] G.H. Baker, «[...] evident from his Italian tour, when he had been well primed beforehand by reading Ruskin and Taine, and on which visit he first became acquainted with masterpieces of art and architecture». Ivi, p. 138.
[12] A. Brooks, «It is not surprising, therefore, that Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence* was Jeanneret valued companion; this book "teaches how to see" (to L'Eplattenier Sep. 19)». A. Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years*, USA, The University Press 1997, p. 101.
[13] G.H. Baker, *Le Corbusier...* cit., p. 15.
[14] S. Von Moos, A. Rüegg, «[...] at least at La Chaux de Fonds it was nonetheless eclipsed totally by the work of another theoretician of the Gothic who defend a vision that was anything but rationalist: John Ruskin. For the young Jeanneret, Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence*, which he owned in a French translation of 1906, was an important influence. (For the importance of Ruskin to Jeanneret, see Turner, Education, 1977) Jeanneret's mentor L'Eplattenier may have studied in Paris». S. Von Moos, A. Rüegg, *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002, p. 48. P.V. Turner, «Ma fu Ruskin che Jeanneret ammirò più di ogni altro: negli anni 40, ricordando che lui e L'Eplattenier "ammiravano con passione Ruskin"». P. V. Turner, *La Formazione di Le Corbusier. Idealismo e Movimento moderno*, Milano, Jaca Books 2001, p. 28.
[15] G.H. Baker, *Le Corbusier...* cit., p. 13.
[16] J. Ruskin, *Tintoretto secondo John Ruskin un'antologia veneziana*, edited by E. Sdegno, Venezia, Marsilio 2018, p.160-164.
[17] «Jeanneret's use of very small lettered annotations is similar to the method used by Ruskin on his sketches, and in his discussion of the quatrefoils on the Doge's Palace Ruskin draws attention on the fact that the glass is set back behind the stonework 'that no flashes on light might interfere with its depth'». Ivi, p. 107.
[18] Ivi, p. 55.
[19] J. Ruskin, *Gli elementi del disegno,* Milano, Adelphi 2015.
[20] J. Ruskin, «Mi piacerebbe disegnare tutto S. Marco – pietra dopo pietra – per ricrearlo nella mente – sfumatura dopo sfumatura», *Le Pietre di Venezia*, introduzione di J.D. Rosenberg, Milano, BUR Rizzoli 2018.

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per conto di **dida**press
Dipartimento di Architettura
Università degli Studi di Firenze
Novembre 2019

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