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RA

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
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Memories on John Ruskin

UNTO THIS LAST

a cura di

SUSANNA CACCIA GHERARDINI

MARCO PRETELLI

RA | restauro archeologico

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John Ruskin, *Column bases, doorway of Badia, Fiesole*. 1874.
Pencil, ink, watercolour and bodycolour.
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Indice

VOL. 1

Tour 9

La cultura inglese e l'interesse per il patrimonio architettonico e paesaggistico in Sicilia, tra scoperte, evoluzione degli studi e divulgazione 10
Zaira Barone

John Ruskin e le "Cattedrali della Terra": le montagne come *monumento* 18
Carla Bartolomucci

Dalla *Lampada della Memoria*: valori imperituri e nuove visioni per la tutela del paesaggio antropizzato. Alcuni casi studio 26
Giulia Beltramo

Il viaggio in Sicilia di John Ruskin. Natura, Immagine, Storia 32
Maria Teresa Campisi

***Verona, and its rivers*. Il paesaggio di Ruskin e la sua tutela.** 40
Marco Cofani, Silvia Dandria

Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Mediterraneo come materiale da costruzione 48
Francesco Collotti

John Ruskin a Milano e il 'culto' per Bernardino Luini 52
Laura Facchin

***Un vecchio corso di educazione estetica (ad uso degli inglesi)*. John Ruskin dentro e fuori Santa Croce (1874-2019)** 60
Simone Fagioli

New perception of human landscape: the case of Memorial Gardens and Avenues 64
Silvia Fineschi, Rachele Manganelli del Fà, Cristiano Rininesi

Dalle pietre al paesaggio: la città storica per John Ruskin 70
Donatella Fiorani

Geologia, tempo e abito urbano *(Imago urbis)* 78
Fabio Fratini, Emma Cantisani, Elena Pecchioni, Silvia Rescic, Barbara Sacchi, Silvia Vettori

***'P. horrid place'*. L'Emilia di John Ruskin (1845)** 86
Michela M. Grisoni

Terre-in-Moto tra bello e sublime. Lettura ruskiniana del paesaggio e dei borghi dell'Abruzzo montano prima e dopo il sisma del 1915 94
Patrizia Montuori

La percezione del paesaggio attraverso la visione di Turner. Riflessioni sull'idea di Etica e Natura in John Ruskin. 100
Emanuele Morezzi

Naturalità del paesaggio toscano nei viaggi di John Ruskin 108
Iole Nocerino

Il pensiero di Ruskin nella storia del restauro architettonico: quale eredità per il XXI secolo? 114
Serena Pesenti

La Venezia analogica di Ruskin. Osservazioni intorno a *I Caratteri urbani delle città venete* 122
Alberto Pireddu

«Piacenza è un luogo orribile...». John Ruskin e la visita nel ducato farnesiano 130
Cristian Prati

John Ruskin e l'architettura classica. La rovina nei contesti medievali come accumulazione della memoria 134
Emanuele Romeo

La città di John Ruskin. Dalla descrizione del paesaggio di Dio alla natura morale degli uomini 142
Maddalena Rossi, Iacopo Zetti

Una nuova idea di paesaggio. William Turner e l'anfiteatro di Santa Maria Capua Vetere 148
Luigi Veronese

Lontano dalle capitali. Il viaggio di Ruskin in Sicilia: una lettura comparata 156
Maria Rosaria Vitale, Paola Barbera

Le periferie della storia 162
Claudio Zanirato

Tutela e Conservazione 169

La diffusione del pensiero di John Ruskin in Italia attraverso il contributo di Roberto Di Stefano 170
Raffaele Amore

L'eredità di John Ruskin in Spagna tra la seconda metà dell'XIX secolo e gli inizi del XX secolo 176
Calogero Bellanca, Susana Mora

Ruskin, il restauro e l'invenzione del nemico. Figure retoriche nel *pamphle*t sul Crystal Palace del 1854 182
Susanna Caccia Gherardini, Carlo Olmo

Il "gotico suo proprio" nel Regno di Napoli: problemi di stile e modelli medioevali. La didattica dell'architettura nel Reale Collegio Militare della Nunziatella 190
Maria Carolina Campone

La religione del suo tempo. L'Ottocento, Ruskin e le utopie profetiche 196
Saverio Carillo

Francesco La Vega, le intuizioni pioneristiche per la cura e la conservazione dei monumenti archeologici di Pompei 204
Valeria Carreras

«Sono felice di parlarti di un architetto, Mr. Philip Webb» 210
Francesca Castanò

I disegni di architettura di John Ruskin in Italia: un percorso verso la definizione di un lessico per il restauro 218
Silvia Crialesi

Una riflessione sul restauro: Melchiorre Minutilla e il dovere di "conservare e non alterare i monumenti" 222
Lorenzo de Stefani

Quale lampada per il futuro? Restauro e creatività per la tutela del patrimonio 228
Giulia Favaretto

La conservazione come atto progettuale di tutela 236
Stefania Franceschi, Leonardo Germani

John Ruskin's legacy in the debate on monument restoration in Spain 242
María Pilar García Cuetos

L'influenza delle teorie ruskiniane nel dibattito sul restauro dei monumenti a Palermo del primo Novecento 248
Carmen Genovese

Le radici filosofiche del pensiero di John Ruskin sulla conservazione dell'architettura 254
Laura Gioeni

Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, ruskiniano eretico 260
Laura Gioeni

Prossemica Architettonica. Riflessioni sulla socialità dell'Architettura 266
Silvia La Placa, Marco Ricciarini

«Every chip of stone and stain is there». L'*hic et nunc* dei dagherrotipi di John Ruskin e la conservazione dell'autenticità 272
Bianca Gioia Marino

***Imagination & deception*. Le Lampade sull'opera di Alfredo d'Andrade e Alfonso Rubbiani** 280
Chiara Mariotti, Elena Pozzi

Educazione e conservazione architettonica in Turchia: Cansever e Ruskin *en regard* 288
Eliana Martinelli

La lezione di Ruskin e il contributo di Boni. *Dalla sublimità parassitaria alla gestione dinamica delle nature archeologiche* 294
Tessa Matteini, Andrea Ugolini

Interventi sul paesaggio. Il caso delle centrali idroelettriche di inizio Novecento in Italia 300
Manuela Mattone, Elena Vigliocco

L'eredità di John Ruskin a Venezia alle soglie del XX secolo: il dibattito sull'approvazione del regolamento edilizio del 1901 306
Giulia Mezzalama

L'estetica ruskiniana nello sviluppo della normativa per la tutela del patrimonio ambientale. 312
Giovanni Minutoli

L'attualità di John Ruskin: Architettura come espressione di sentimenti alla luce degli studi estetici e neuroscientifici 316
Lucina Napoleone

Il viaggio in Italia e il preludio della conservazione urbana: prossimità di Ruskin e Buls 322
Monica Naretto

Le Pietre di Milano. La conservazione come paradosso. 330
Gianfranco Pertot

L'etica della polvere ossia la conservazione della materia fra antiche e nuove istanze 336
Enrica Petrucci, Renzo Chiovelli

VOL. 2

Tutela e Conservazione 9

John Ruskin nel *milieu* culturale del Meridione d'Italia tra Otto e Novecento 10
Renata Picone

Architettura e teoria socioeconomica in John Ruskin 18
Chiara Pilozzi

«*Nulla muore di ciò che ha vissuto*». Ripensare i borghi abbandonati ripercorrendo il pensiero di John Ruskin 24
Valentina Pintus

L'abbazia di San Galgano "la sublimità degli squarci" 28
Francesco Pisani

L'eredità di John Ruskin 'critico della società' 34
Renata Prescia

Pietre di Rimini. L'Influenza di John Ruskin sul pensiero di Augusto Campana e i riverberi nella ricostruzione postbellica del Tempio Malatestiano. 40
Marco Pretelli, Alessia Zampini

John Ruskin e le Valli valdesi: etica protestante e conservazione del patrimonio comunitario 46
Riccardo Rudiero

How did Adriano Olivetti influence John Ruskin? 50
Francesca Sabatini, Michele Trimarchi

Goethe e Ruskin e la conservazione dei monumenti e del paesaggio in Sicilia 58
Rosario Scaduto

L'eredità del pensiero di John Ruskin nell'opera di Patrick Geddes: il patrimonio culturale come motore dell'evoluzione. 64
Giovanni Spizuoco

Ruskin and Garbatella, Architectonic Prose Cultivating the Poem of Moderate Modernity 70
Aban Tahmasebi

Il lessico di John Ruskin per il restauro d'architettura: termini, significati e concetti. 76
Barbara Tetti

John Ruskin, dal restauro come distruzione al ripristino filologico 82
Francesco Tomaselli

L'attualità del pensiero di John Ruskin sulle architetture del passato: una proposta di rilettura in chiave semiotica. 90
Francesco Trovò

Città, verde, monumenti. I rapporti tra Giacomo Boni e John Ruskin 98
Maria Grazia Turco, Flavia Marinos

Papers on the Conservation of Ancient Monuments and Remains. John Ruskin, Gilbert Scott e la Carta inglese della Conservazione (Londra, 1865) 104
Gaspare Massimo Ventimiglia

La lezione ruskiniana nella tutela paesaggistico-ambientale promossa da Giovannoni. Il pittoresco, la natura, l'architettura. 116
Maria Vitiello

Dal Disegno alla Fotografia 125

La fotogrammetria applicata alla documentazione fotografica storica per la creazione di un patrimonio perduto. 126
Daniele Amadio, Giovanni Bruschi, Maria Vittoria Tappari

La Verona di John Ruskin: "il posto più caro in Italia" 134
Claudia Aveta

Ruskin e la fotografia: dai connoisseurship in art ai restauratori instagramers 142
Luigi Cappelli

Alla ricerca del pittoresco. Il primo viaggio di Ruskin a Roma 146
Marco Carpiceci, Fabio Colonnese

Ruskin e la rappresentazione del sublime 154
Enrico Cicalò

Elementi di conservazione nell'archeologia coloniale in Egitto 162
Michele Coppola

Tracce sul territorio e riferimenti visivi. Il disegno dei ruderi nelle mappe d'archivio in Basilicata 168
Giuseppe Damone

Lo sguardo del forestiero: le terrecotte architettoniche padane negli album e nei taccuini di viaggio anglosassoni dalla metà dell'Ottocento. Influssi nel contesto ferrarese 174
Rita Fabbri

Ruskin a Pisa: visioni e memorie della città e dei suoi monumenti 180
Francesca Giusti

La documentazione dei beni culturali "minori" per la loro tutela e conservazione. Il monastero di Santa Chiara in Pescia 186
Gaia Lavoratti, Alessandro Merlo

Carnet de voyage: A Ruskin's legacy on capture and transmission the architectural travel experience 192
Sasha Londoño Venegas

L'espressività del rilievo digitale: possibilità di rappresentazione grafica 198
Giovanni Pancani, Matteo Bigongiari

Ruskin e il suo doppio. Il "metodo" Ruskin 204
Marco Pretelli

Disegno della luce o stampa del bello. L'influenza di John Ruskin nel riconoscimento della fotografia come arte. 212
Irene Ruiz Bazán

John Ruskin and Albert Goodwin: Learning, Working and Becoming an Artist 218
Chiaki Yokoyama

L'applicazione della Memoria 224
Claudio Zanirato

Linguaggio letteratura e ricezione 231

Alcune note sul restauro, dagli scritti di J. Ruskin (1846-1856), tra erudizione e animo 232
Brunella Canonaco

Etica della polvere: dal degrado alla patina all'impronta 238
Marina D'Aprile

Another One Bites the Dust: Ruskin's Device in The Ethics 244
Hiroshi Emoto

Ruskin, i Magistri Com(m)acini e gli Artisti dei Laghi. Fra rilancio del Medioevo lombardo e ricezione operativa del restauro romantico 248
Massimiliano Ferrario

«Non si facciano restauri»: d'Annunzio e Ruskin a Reims. 256
Raffaele Giannantonio

J. Heinrich Vogeler e la Colonia artistica di Worpswede (1899-1920) | Reformarchitektur tra design e innovazione sociale 262
Andreina Milan

La fortuna critica di John Ruskin in Giappone nella prima metà del Novecento 268
Olimpia Niglio

Ruskin a Verona, 1966. Riflessioni a cinquant'anni dalla mostra di Castelvecchio 276
Sara Rocco

Traversing Design and Making. From Ruskin's Craftsmanship to Digital Craftsmanship 282
Zhou Jianjia, Philip F. Yuan

Tempo storia e storiografia 289

I sistemi costruttivi nell'architettura medievale: John Ruskin e le coperture a volta 290
Silvia Beltramo

«Disturbed immagination» e «true political economy». Aspirazioni e sfide tra Architettura e Politica in John Ruskin 298
Alessandra Biasi

John Ruskin and the argumentation of the "imperfect" building as theoretical support for the understanding of the phenomenon today 304
Caio R. Castro, Amílcar Gil Pires

Conservazione della memoria nell'arte dei giardini e nel paesaggio: la caducità della rovina ruskiniana, metafora dell'uomo contemporaneo 310
Marco Ferrari

I giardini di Ruskin, tra Verità della Natura, flora preraffaelita e Wild Garden 318
Maria Adriana Giusti

John Ruskin la dimensione del tempo e il restauro della memoria 326
Rosa Maria Giusto

Il carattere e la storia dell'architettura bizantina nel pensiero di John Ruskin a confronto con le politiche e gli studi Europei nel XIX secolo 332
Nora Lombardini

Cronologia e temporalità, senso del tempo e memoria: l'eredità di Ruskin nel progetto di restauro, oggi 340
Daniela Pittaluga

La temporalità e la materialità come fattori di individuazione dell'opera in Ruskin. Riverberi nella cultura della conservazione 348
Angela Squassina

"Before and after the Gothic style": lo sguardo di Ruskin all'architettura, dai templi di Paestum al tardo Rinascimento 354
Simona Talenti

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 XX[e] 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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