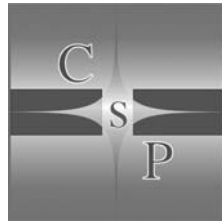


The Venice Charter Revisited

The Venice Charter Revisited:
Modernism, Conservation and Tradition
in the 21st Century

Edited by

Matthew Hardy



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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FOREWORD

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES



CLARENCE HOUSE

It was forty four years ago that the Venice Charter declared that unavoidable additions to historic monuments must “bear a contemporary stamp”, and be “distinct”. Like Shakespeare’s Achilles, who wished to “make distinct the breach from where the spirit flew” - in his case the spirit of his enemy - the Venice Charter, by requiring us to make distinct the breach between past and present, has likewise often caused the spirit to fly from old buildings and places.

Yet it was only in 2005 that, for some extraordinary reason, U.N.E.S.C.O. reaffirmed this damaging doctrine, advising against what it called “pseudo-historical design”, fearful that it might prevent alternative readings of history and lead to the ossification of culture. But what more evidence does one need that a culture is ossified than that it refuses to engage with the voices of the past, avoids making decisions and lacks the confidence that it can ever again create harmony in buildings and places? Perhaps the very concept of harmony is considered too subversive in today’s increasingly dissonant and fragmented world?

Buildings and cities are portraits of the human condition; they should not be regarded merely as snapshots of moments in time or historical artefacts to be exhibited behind glass. When we conserve, when we restore, we are both recognizing and sharing in the humanity of those who began the work. Do we really want to intrude our “contemporary” ideology into this timeless dialogue? And what is this ideology other than a perpetual obsession with denying that hard-won human experience, wisdom and a profound knowledge of Nature has any relevance whatsoever to our lives today? I would argue that in view of the immense environmental and spiritual crisis the world is facing, we have never been in greater need of re-discovering those abandoned principles that can once again re-connect us to the world about us and within us.

We often hear of old cities as palimpsests - that is, like documents continually scraped and written over again. Each layer is a readable thing; yet often when we scratch the surface we find evidence of an older text beneath. Everyone loves such cities, of which Venice is so fine an example. Why else are they so over-crowded with people desperately searching for beauty in a world that is being rapidly disfigured by unstoppable ugliness? The Venice *Charter*, however, would have cities be like word-processed documents where all the edits are clearly indicated in red - accurate, maybe, but hardly a pleasure to read. Yet *read* cities we must. But we must read them with our hearts and souls as well as our minds and intellects. Of course, this is the crux of the problem in that the contemporary ideology specifically forbids the very idea of hearts and souls, as if the emotions and feelings experienced by mankind are somehow an affront to empirical science.

At a distance of nearly half a century, the Venice Charter itself has become something of an historical monument and, as such, it behoves us not to dismiss out of hand any good points it might contain. But at the same time we should also now endeavour to recommence the conversation its drafters seemed so reluctant to have - that conversation with the centuries of *living* tradition that preceded it.

I pray that the I.N.T.B.A.U. Venice Declaration, written by the authors of this book, will help lead us back to that larger conversation, of which we all stand in such dire need.



Charles

EDITOR'S PREFACE

MATTHEW HARDY

SECRETARY, INTERNATIONAL NETWORK
FOR TRADITIONAL BUILDING, ARCHITECTURE
& URBANISM (INTBAU)

In early November 2006, INTBAU held its annual conference in Venice. The event, which had been some years in planning, set out to situate the 1964 Venice Charter (Appendix I) in the context of its times, to subject its text to a close reading, to examine the range of philosophies and architectural responses that characterised conservation before the Venice Charter, to hear contemporary case studies of the Venice Charter in use around the world in a variety of cultural contexts, and to draft a policy for reconstructions and for traditional architecture and urbanism in historic areas. The 64 chapters of this book present the results of this interrogation of the Venice Charter.

The Venice Charter was a major step towards better conservation of traditional buildings and places. Drafted by delegates from places including Peru and Mexico, Tunisia, France and Italy, and finally written by two Belgians and an Italian, the Preamble of the Venice Charter emphasises that each country is responsible for applying the principles within the framework of its own culture and traditions, in “the full richness of their authenticity”.

The breadth of the consensus achieved remains impressive, and the Charter has since been of inestimable value in the conservation of cultural heritage the world over. It became the founding document of ICOMOS (the International Conference on Monuments and Sites), and was later adopted by UNESCO, (the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization). Today it provides the fundamental reference for conservation policy for the 191 UNESCO member states.

The Venice Charter followed a series of charters on conservation that appeared in the inter-war and post-war periods. In 1931, the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments was held in Athens. The Athens Charter produced at that event set out to proscribe the popular “integrative” restoration epitomised by the work of Viollet-le-Duc and his contemporaries, preferring instead an approach that respected each successive previous intervention, and encouraging a view of old buildings as “historical documents” in themselves. Viewed as such, historic buildings could be studied – and admired – but never copied, for fear of “falsifying” history. This modernist art-historical concept was promptly incorporated into the Italian Fascist’s *Norme per il restauro dei monumenti* of 1932, and inspired Le Corbusier to write a text on conservation following CIAM’s fourth congress in 1933.

Post-war reconstruction in the period 1945-1955 was nevertheless characterised by much reconstruction and by large-scale restorations of damaged cities in both eastern and western Europe, such as Warsaw, Gdansk, Blois and Vicenza. Concern at the scale of war damage prompted the Hague Convention of 1954, which produced the *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, issued in 1956. A year later, a suggestion was made to update the Athens Charter, which resulted in the Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, held in Venice in May 1964. The Venice Charter it produced reflects, in its 16 paragraphs, the political and cultural history of the tumultuous mid-20th century.

The post-war period has in recent years been subject to considerable historical research. We now know, for instance, that the West covertly funded cultural institutions with the aim of promoting Modernism – particularly abstract impressionism – to create a clear contrast with the Soviet bloc’s preference for social realism and traditional architecture. Modernism was presented as democratic and free, and traditional art as repressive and totalitarian. The effect was to polarise public taste and to distort the history of the period for a generation or more. This is the milieu that produced the Venice Charter.

The Charter’s insistence that buildings and settings be seen as historical documents that must not be “falsified” perhaps reflects the common post-war modernist belief in the “end of history”. But in recent years the requirement of Article 9 of the Charter that new work “must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp”

has been misused to justify *contrasting* modern additions, alterations and new buildings in historic places worldwide, and to validate modernist interventions in traditional buildings and places. In recent years, these misused clauses have become a crucial regulatory tool used in development control to block any form of traditional design. INTBAU sees this as an undesirable situation that privileges the voice of the transnational class of modernist architects and their multinational patrons over those of local peoples and traditional cultures. By contrast, INTBAU seeks to advance a pluralist view that would allow considerations of cultural continuity, tradition and collective memory to balance the Venice Charter's requirement that buildings be treated as historic documents.

The essays in this book all take the Venice Charter as a point of reference. They examine the circumstances that led to its being written, who was involved in writing it, and how its principles were reflected in the many declarations, charters and conventions that followed. Others look at examples of how the Charter is used around the world, from places as diverse as Charleston, Lhasa, Bhopal, and Paris, and Italy, Norway, Nigeria and New Zealand. Some look at reconstruction, others at new buildings in historic cities, with a variety of successes and failures reported in detail. And some look back at how conservation was conceptualised and implemented before 1964. But overall, each reports in its own way on the latest ideas about history, heritage, monuments, modernism, conservation and tradition in a 21st century context.

Finally, INTBAU's *Venice Declaration on the Conservation of Monuments and Sites in the 21st Century* (2007, Appendix II) sets out our views of how the Venice Charter can be interpreted to support traditional responses to historic buildings. We hope it will support the efforts of the many citizens, planners, architects and urbanists who seek to create new buildings in a more harmonious relationship with historic buildings and places. We seek not to replace the Venice Charter, but to offer an interpretation which supports traditional architecture and urbanism in historic places. I hope you will enjoy this book.

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I would like to offer my profound gratitude to the members of INTBAU who, through their subscriptions, enabled the production of this book. Thanks are due to as well my colleague, Aura Neag, who assisted daily during the long gestation, to my former colleague Cyndi Chiao, who organised the call for papers, and to my former co-worker Lynette Greene, for her help and assistance in Venice.

Many thanks also go to the 64 authors who have contributed chapters from around the world, and for keeping to my authoritarian specifications for text and images. They are the real backbone of this work and they contributed their time free of charge. Thanks go to the 22 co-authors of the INTBAU Venice Declaration, who contributed ideas to the rough draft produced in Venice, and to the over 100 signatories who have supported it since. My profound gratitude goes to Michael Mehaffy, who undertook to turn the “ideas” into a concise and readable text. I am very grateful to Dinu Bumbaru, Secretary-General of ICOMOS, for his advice to INTBAU to consider writing an interpretation of the Venice Charter, rather than a replacement. Thanks also go to Dennis Rodwell, who offered valuable suggestions about the Preface. Thanks are due to Carol Koulikourdi and Amanda Millar at CSP, who turned nearly 70 disparate files into a book.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Susan Parham for her constant support and encouragement over the last four years.

SECTION 1 –

WHY REVISIT THE VENICE CHARTER

HERITAGE

ROBERT ADAM

Heritage as a Phenomenon

A wish to keep our built heritage became political in the later twentieth century. In the UK it had its roots in the late nineteenth century. In the period after the Second World War it grew in strength worldwide.

In the mid- to late-twentieth century it was an important counterbalance to the cult of modernity where “nothing is more new and modern than the cult of the new” (Poggoli 1968: 214).

The heritage movement now has to struggle against the belief that progress *is* change and that change unchecked is the purest form of progress. As a result, heritage is often seen by professionals as an anti-progressive movement.

Heritage is a genuinely popular phenomenon. It is represented by local and national societies with large aggregate memberships and the possible loss of built heritage is often leads to organised objection. The cult of modernity, on the other hand, is dominated by professionally trained artists, architects, academics and administrators.

Heritage and its relationship with aggressive modernity represent something fundamental in modern society.

Cultural Heritage

In Britain the word “heritage” often stands alone for all those aspects of the man-made environment – buildings and landscape – that have any historic significance. In other countries these are often called “cultural heritage”. “Cultural heritage” goes beyond of archaeology and monuments. Following sociological thinking, “heritage” has been replaced by “memory” — as with the collective memory of the community. This

brings it right up to the recent past. Now, in theory, heritage is whatever a community decides it to be — there is no given historic distance.

The concept of heritage can be applied to other aspects of society.

- Artistic and literary heritage;
- political and economic heritage;
- civilizations have a scientific and technical heritage;
- heritage of institutions and practices;
- religious heritage of belief and worship; groups and nations share a social and ceremonial heritage;
- nations function under a legal and administrative heritage.

Heritage is all those things in society that have their roots in the past practices and ideas of that society.

When we discuss any kind of heritage, we don't just mean the history of the place, institution or idea. Heritage is something that has special significance to individual communities. Heritage is local. While we may admire aspects of Japanese heritage, if we are Europeans we know they're not part of our heritage. As heritage is recognised as part of a past exclusive to a particular community, then it must be part of the identity of that community. It will be an essential element – if not the essential element – of the culture of a community.

Heritage is always cultural heritage. But “cultural” must be seen in the fullest sense of that word: it is not just that we may share the culture of art and refinement; it is that “the primary difference between our species and all others is our reliance on cultural transmission of information” (Dennet 1995: 331). This is “culture” in the anthropological sense as that which defines human society. It takes us to the very foundation of what it is to be human.

Dual Inheritance

The ability to accumulate socially learned behaviours over many generations has allowed humans to develop subtle powerful technologies and to assemble complex institutions that permit us to live in larger, and more complex, societies than any other mammal species. These accumulated cultural traditions allow us to exploit a far wider range of habitats than any other animal, so that even with only hunting and

gathering technology, humans became the most widespread mammal on earth (Boyd and Richerson 1995).

To be human is to have a culture that allows us to take advantage of the accumulated experience of our ancestors. “Human cultural traditions show universality, uniformity, and history in a manner and to a degree that seem qualitatively different from that of any other species” (Tomasello 1996: 314).

The relationship between human cultural traditions and genetic legacy is the dual inheritance of the environmental anthropologists Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson. They recognised that in addition to the genetic inheritance that has made all creatures, humans had additionally a unique cultural inheritance and that these two legacies behaved in similar but not identical ways.

A genetic past is our inheritance from our evolutionary history and our cultural past is our inheritance from our more immediate ancestors. Millions of years of evolution control our behaviour but evolution has also given us the ability to modify our genetic behaviour by transmitting culture from one generation to another. Culture is transmitted through learning and the cumulative experience allows the development of skills, cooperative behaviour and conscious identity other creatures don't have. We don't just have to rely on genetically programmed behaviour for survival, supplemented by trial and error and parent-to-child learning. We have a shorter term and more flexible behavioural force. This is *culture* and it can only be developed and gained by the retention of a *heritage* of behaviour accumulated through multiple generations.

Our behaviour and identity are our cultural heritage and the ability to hold such a heritage is what makes us human. Culture *is* the heritage of behaviour and memory. Culture is heritage and heritage culture.

Social Animals

Culture is not just the heritage of practice it is also the heritage of society. Humans are social creatures. It's not only the family unit that is responsible for cultural transmission it is also the whole social group. We're not just taught by our parents, we learn from across our social group — formally or informally.

Like other social creatures, we find ways to form bonds with across our social group. Culture not only gives us the ability to accumulate practical experience over generations, it adds another dimension. It has allowed humans to form societies of a size and complexity denied to other creatures.

The relatively few animal societies that have levels of cooperation similar to those of humans are typically composed of close relatives, while cooperation in large groups among humans includes cases where co-operators are virtually unrelated (Boyd and Richerson: 1998).

This bond between large and small groups is kept up by differences between one group and another, one culture and another. These can be created just with unique practical activities but it's much more. Activities, ceremonies, ideas and artefacts signal and maintain the identity of the group. These are accumulated from a run of generations and transmitted – sometimes with modifications – to the next generation. These are the glue that holds human societies of all sizes together. They are their collective memory.

Collective Memory

Without our memories we are nothing.

Memory is what defines who we are and who others are in our own minds. Memory shapes our intellectual and moral personality. [...] Indeed, it would be impossible to live as one person, with an individual history, or to possess our being in a continuous fashion, without the memory threads that constantly link our present to our past and prospective future (Bourtchouladze 2002: 172).

In the 1920s and 30s the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, realised that memory itself was not a free agent but was conditioned by the circumstances in which the memory was formed. He identified a type of memory that could be called social and said that “there is no social idea that would not at the same time be a recollection of the society” (Halbwachs 1992: 108-9). This is the shared or collective memory of the group. This collective memory is defined by Barbara Misztal “as the representation of the past, both that shared by a group and that which is actively commemorated, that enacts and gives substance to the group’s identity, its present conditions and its vision of the future” (Misztal 2003: 7).



Figure 1. House of Parliament, London. A representation of a mythic gothic past as a focus of national identity for a reformed modernising historic institution.

Photo: Dorin Boilă.

For a group to identify with a common past or common heritage, members of the group have to share some common idea of that past. Group identity is based on the collective memory of the heritage of the group. This is the culture of that group. It can be shared by a large community and it can be subdivided into memories particular to any number of sub-groups or communities. Each group will have an individual mix of common memories that define it and create its unique culture. This common culture is transmitted over time to all members of the community and, by sharing this collective memory, the community defines and identifies itself. The heritage of a community is what makes the culture of the community.

Realms of Memory

Heritage, culture and memory include all activities, ideas and artefacts particular to a community. Buildings and man-made landscapes are, nonetheless, one of the most significant aspects of group memory “as they are overlain with symbolic associations to past events [and so] play an important role in helping to preserve group memory” (Miztal 2003: 16).

Pierre Nora has identified four categories of realms, sites or places where a group can locate its communal memories. These are: symbolic sites, such as places of pilgrimage or for the acting out of ceremonies; functional sites, such as autobiographies and other literature; monumental sites, such as cemeteries and buildings; and topographical sites, such as libraries and museums.



Figures 2a and 2b. Eiffel Tower, Paris and Statue of Liberty, New York. Places of memory where a group can locate its communal memories.

“Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events” (Nora 1989: 22), and these sites are more than the simple record of any kind of objective history as their significance remains “concrete and distinct regardless of whether they are mythological or historical” (Heller 2001: 103).