

# DT

## DOSSIER TRANSLATIONS

### Conservation as an Expanded Field

Guest editor: Natalia Escobar Castrillón

## Introduction


Natalia Escobar Castrillón

*This issue of *Materia Architectura* addresses the theme of Heritage proposing an epistemological change of the conservation discipline that aims to renew its discourse, in order to respond to the challenges of the contemporary world, such as the incipient and massive urban growth, or the burden of heritage, as it is presently understood, is and will become for future generations. The values of stability and permanence that inspired preservation theories and practices in the 20th century are no longer valid in an increasingly transient world of disposable objects, growing population and scarcity of resources. Conservation as an expanded field is a more flexible concept that accepts and even prescribes transformation as a licit and appropriate conservation strategy. This understanding of the discipline radically differs from traditional practices based on the material restoration of artifacts and objects without considering their wider cultural implications.*

*Change has historically being characterized as a negative concept by those who were in power. The State, Christianity, or aristocracy, have defined it as crisis, sin or rebellion in relation to the hegemonic position they were trying to preserve. At present, preservationists and institutions such as Unesco, as well as people and politicians, assume this role and claim their legitimacy in outstanding, universal and a-temporal values that they project into objects. They aim to maintain the myth of permanence in a world increasingly in flux. On the other hand, emergent discourses from practitioners and particularly scholars such as Professor David Lowenthal, define preservation as illusory: "because material objects are continuously transformed, every stage in preservation forces choices among many valid, but irreconcilable criteria. No preservation decision is logically right or permanently appropriate" (Lowenthal, 1989, p. 69).*

*Conservation understood as a theory of change implies the redefinition of limits, parameters and authority upon which the practice operates. This approach opens up the discipline to new themes and issues that are usually*

*considered tangential or external to the preservation field and considers formal and aesthetic justifications as constructed narratives that in fact hide the alliance between conservation and power. Today, conflicts over urban space reveal existing tensions between different ideologies, political views, religion, culture and transnational interests. As a result, conservation must be understood as a powerful tool for renegotiating the dominant discourses shaping places. Conservation becomes then an active endeavor, no longer reduced to a nominal task for the designation of objects, but rather as a concept with agency and capacity to create and defend an alternative, dynamic discourse.*

*As a result, if history represents the first attempt to negotiate the past, conservation becomes the renegotiation of history. The following articles attempt to create a more inclusive version of the past. K. Michael Hays' understanding of history holds that the past is continuously reinvented in the present moment and as such can be used to construct alternative futures; Felipe Hernández attempts to reestablish the dynamic and experiential relationship between society and modern architectural heritage; Alrmando Caroca Fernández disassociates change from devaluation and proposes to identify the potential of architecture by transforming it; Alejandro Crispiani and Tomás Errázuriz Infante suggest assessing material debris from catastrophes because of their evocative capacity; Alejandro de Castro Mazarro advocates for the recognition and conservation of the environmental value of informal settlements; finally, José Joaquín Parra Bañón utterly dissolves the material dimension of cities and resort to literature and fiction places for memory. *

### REFERENCE

LOWENTHAL, D. (1989). Material Preservation and its Alternatives. *Perspecta*, 25, 66-77.