



FRANÇOISE CHOAY  
*Imagen: ©Andrea Pane.*



## Françoise Choay. Heritage, urbanization and challenges of conservation. Editorial

*Each text is unique and, simultaneously, it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original, because language itself, in its essence, is a translation [...]. But this reasoning can be inverted without losing its validity: all texts are original because each translation is different. Each translation is, to a certain extent, an invention and thus constitutes a unique text.<sup>1</sup>*

Octavio Paz

In *Traducción: literatura y literalidad* (1971), Octavio Paz perfectly illustrated the richness of written texts, and what makes up the multiple dilemmas of those who decide to embark upon a translation – the challenge of how to ensure the understanding and transmission of the author’s message. The aim of this journal is to encourage conversations and discussions on the history and theories of conservation and, to this end, it uses translations that allow audiences from different corners of the world access to the texts. In this 10<sup>th</sup> volume of *Conversaciones...* the challenge is greater than usual. Françoise Choay is not only a renowned historian of urban and architectural theories and forms, but she has herself compiled and translated texts by other authors, always with great care. We hope to do her justice in this volume.

We selected two texts by this celebrated author, which show her analysis of the evolution of the concepts of monument and historic monument, themes that she elaborated from her detailed reading of Alois Riegl, and which she complemented with a historical overview of the discipline. She described how this has defined the way they have been protected and preserved over time, and how it has shaped what we understand today as heritage. The first of the texts is the introduction to her book *Le Patrimoine en questions. Anthologie pour un combat*, published by Seuil in 2009. The second, written two years later, is part of *La Terre qui meurt*, published by Fayard. We are deeply

---

<sup>1</sup> Original quotation: “Cada texto es único y, simultáneamente, es la traducción de otro texto. Ningún texto es enteramente original, porque el lenguaje mismo, en su esencia, es una traducción [...]. Pero ese razonamiento puede invertirse sin perder validez: todos los textos son originales porque cada traducción es distinta. Cada traducción es, hasta cierto punto, una invención y así constituye un texto único”.

grateful to the author and to both publishers for allowing us to reproduce and translate these important excerpts. In these texts, Françoise Choay outlines the main elements of the fight to be waged to protect heritage. Having witnessed the transformations of our planet since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she raises a strong voice against the risks of standardization on a global scale, which in her eyes represents the greatest threat to our societies. She fights against the generic use of the term heritage, which blurs the difference between monument and historic monument, and which confers that special character to many more human creations, making it more complex to define conservation actions and as well as planning and protection strategies. Choay also raises her voice to remind us of the importance of training architects and urban planners, where observation and drawing are fundamental.

Choay's calls to action in these two texts generate different reactions in our guest authors for this volume, thereby fueling a rich debate from different geographical perspectives. For Jukka Jokilehto, the re-reading of Choay's texts was an occasion to reflect on human creativity, and how the recognition of different types of creative forms, seen in the framework of different traditions, has led to the definition of various typologies and to the characterization of creative expressions, transformed into tangible elements, which translate and materialize intangible aspects. Jokilehto also discusses the implications this has had on the way heritage is approached and protected.

Ángela Rojas, on her part, focuses on urban heritage, and in particular, its integrity and authenticity in light of the ideas put forward by Choay in her extensive work on the subject. The author analyzes the importance of the city and its different functions, by reviewing different models that have defined its creation, evolution, and transformation, and in the face of changes in the use and adaptation of spaces by and for contemporary life. Using some examples from Cuba, but also from her extensive knowledge of urban heritage, Rojas discusses the values of urban space, and different solutions, some more fortunate than others, that have been developed in the face of these processes of change and patrimonialization of historic centers and traditional neighborhoods in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Lauren O'Connell, a researcher who has an in-depth knowledge of Françoise Choay since she was, in effect, her student, and later for having translated *L'Allégorie du patrimoine* into English, presents a broad overview of Choay's thought. She highlights, in particular, the pioneering role Choay played in re-evaluating or re-discovering actors and theorists of built heritage conservation, always analyzing their influence from a novel perspective. O'Connell illustrates the ideas of Choay and other authors, in particular Viollet-le-Duc, Riegl, and Haussmann, but also Alberti, through her own analysis of the evolution of the Tour Saint-Jacques in Paris, which is symptomatic of the changing positions over time of heritage conservation and modern urbanism.

María Pilar Biel Ibáñez takes us to the world of industrial heritage in Spain. In her text she contrasts Choay's ideas about this type of heritage with the evolution of its protection, conservation, and use in different regions of Spain. Biel Ibáñez presents a careful review of the expansion of the concept of heritage to incorporate industrial remains and complexes, and how a specific discipline developed around it, with important questions and reflections on what this implies. Biel Ibáñez shows,

with various examples and supporting images, the theoretical advances made in this field, as well as their practical applications, and highlights the actions still pending to be able to understand and protect this heritage in its integrity.

Oliver Martin addresses the global challenges introduced by Françoise Choay in her texts, and shows a course of action for the recognition of the historic quality of built spaces. Discussing some of Choay's approaches, for Martin it is possible to join efforts at the international level, to generate regional or global initiatives to safeguard and protect it. He highlights in particular initiatives such as the *World Heritage Convention* or the *Faro Framework Convention* that emphasizes the value of cultural heritage for society. Martin advocates, with an equally strong voice, for high-quality *Baukultur*, a new approach to the construction of our built spaces that is committed to the common good. This concept, based on eight quality criteria, was adopted at the European level through the *Davos Declaration of 2018*.

Finally, Andrea Pane offers a broad overview of Françoise Choay's ideas, with a detailed biographical description interspersed with the development of the author's thought. This text, rich in details, shows the evolution of the French researcher's interests. Pane emphasizes the important role played by the contact, knowledge, and discovery of important texts by Italian authors, particularly Alberti and Giovannoni, but also others later on, whose study served to model an important part of Choay's own ideas on urbanism and the protection of urban and built heritage.

With this 10<sup>th</sup> issue, we are pleased to celebrate Françoise Choay, an important author in the history and theory of conservation, with whom we hope our readers will engage in new conversations and debates about our work in a globalized world that imposes new challenges and will require answers to maintain the character of our cities and our heritage. We hope that this choir of voices, translated as faithfully as possible into several languages, will continue to make an echoing call for the protection of our built heritage, of our languages, of what makes up the richness, diversity, and uniqueness of each community, including all its inhabitants, traditional and new.

Valerie Magar  
Rome, July 2021