

SUM OR TOTAL?

THE CASE OF THE CISTERCIAN MONASTERY IN MIAMI

Fabio Colonnese¹, Maria Grazia D'Amelio², Lorenzo Grieco²

¹Sapienza University of Rome

Department of History, Drawing and Restoration of Architecture

fabio.colonnese@uniroma1.it

²University of Rome Tor Vergata

Department of Business Engineering

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WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST

MIAMI SPANISH MONASTERY

ART COLLECTIONS

MOVING ARCHITECTURE

CREATIVE RESTORATION

As an architecture is moved, the relationship with the place it was designed for is lost. Its original functions are altered and it acquires novel meanings, concerning with not only the new context but the act of transfer itself. Its authenticity seems, on the one hand, to be guaranteed by the original materials, while, on the other hand, it is challenged by the different form and reception, which is somehow mediated by the idea of its

previous, pure existence. The story of the ancient Spanish monastery purchased by William Randolph Hearst in 1925, dismantled, shipped and rebuilt in Miami, Florida decades later is here described, analysed and discussed as a sort of borderline of the idea of 'fake', by focusing on the historical, epistemological and symbolic value of interventions that challenge the 'nature' of architecture itself.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of 'fake' and of 'copy' or 'imitation' are rather elusive whenever they are applied to architecture, an art in which the creative authorship and the physical production often do not coincide, and the productive process implies a plenty of compromises. These concepts, as the opposite ones of 'originality' and 'authenticity', present evanescent delimitations under several points of view (Schultz, 2020): from the variations a project is affected during the construction to the post-occupancy adaptations, which are sometimes necessary to the survival of the building; from the industrial technology needed for a faithful reproduction of the project, to the restoration procedures, which imply a gradual replacement of the architectural components.

Is the *Esprit Nouveau Pavilion* Giuliano Gresleri and José Oubrierie rebuilt in Bologna in 1977 (Gresleri, 1979) a 'copy' or a 'fake'? Cesare Brandi (1977, p. 66) sustained that the difference between forgery and copy or imitation is not in the productive method or materials but in the intentions. Forgery occurs whenever one is simulating an authentic work to mislead the viewer rather than to studying or documenting the work itself. From this point of view, the adjective 'fake' properly describes the architectural illusion produced by deceiving perspectival devices, by mirroring surfaces, or by projection mapping which transforms the façade of buildings for the tourists' pleasure.

Obviously, the Bologna pavilion is just a copy built to promote the knowledge of Le Corbusier's architecture, but the sharpness of this judgment dissipates when sections of 'authentic' buildings or entire blocks are moved from a place to another. Can they be still judged 'authentic' buildings?

Moving deprives them of the univocal relationship with the primitive geographical, historical, and cultural context they had been conceived for and disclose them to novel meanings (D'Amelio & De Cesaris, 2019). This process of re-semantising implies several degrees of betrayal of truth¹ and



Fig. 1 Francis P. Johnson, *Ancient Spanish monastery - Miami Beach, Florida, August 1954*. Courtesy State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

impacts on the building's aura and authenticity. Does a torn-up structure, after being transferred and rebuilt elsewhere, albeit with primal materials, keep the aura of its pristine configuration or does it become a kind of fictive representation? Think of the Pergamon Museum in Berlin and the captivity into which the Pergamon Altar (2nd century BC) or the Istar Gate (6th century BC) were forced (Marchand, 1996; Payne, 2008). The Gate, one of the eight entries to the ancient Babylon, was cut from the blue-tiled walls and reduced in size (Bilsel, 2012). The relocation transformed the structure into a simulacrum, modified its meaning, deleted its relationship with the place, and drastically turned its function from a passageway to a scenography.

The relocation of the architecture in the Pergamon Museum is neither a unique nor a rare case in history.

Often in wars, besides slaves, valuables and artworks, the predatory action of the winners comprises the appropriation of monuments or fragments of architecture. This practice is intended to emphasize the subjugation of one civilization over another. In recent ages, collectors have subtly replaced weapons with money to manifest an analogous power, making possible what seemed impossible: turning architecture, a traditionally permanent work, into a mobile artwork.

This practice is exemplified by the daring story of the acquisition of the Cistercian monastery of Santa Maria la Real in Sacramenia, near Segovia, Spain and its reconstruction in Miami, Florida (Figure 1). The building's vicissitudes started from its acquisition by the American businessman and politician William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951), who had it disassembled and shipped to the United States. This episode belongs to the early 20th-century diaspora of ancient architectures from Europe, mainly medieval cloisters from Spain

Fig. 2 Unknown, *The Hearst Castle under construction in the early 1930s*. Courtesy Hearst Castle/ California State Parks.



(Merino de Cáceres & Martínez Ruiz, 2012) and France (Brugéat, 2018a, 2018b). Nevertheless, the story of monastery, here reconstructed, is exceptional for several reasons. In particular, the cogent philological ambiguity of the cloister's reconstruction calls for a reflection on what is and what is not (or no longer) 'authentic' or 'true'. This ambiguity is indirectly testified by the difficulty in finding proper words in the architectural terminology to name the interventions the monastery was submitted to, which are here analysed in their epistemological and symbolic power. In this sense, images and terms here borrowed from other disciplines such as biology, anatomy, or linguistics, are indirectly suggesting that those interventions are somehow opposed to the intrinsic 'nature' of architecture.

PURCHASING HISTORY. HEARST AND THE CISTERCIAN MONASTERY

In the vibrant industrial and financial growth of the first post-war period, American collectors happened to have a reckless attitude towards the European artistic heritage. It was likely fed by an ancestral complex of cultural inferiority as well as the economical subordination of some geographical areas in Europe, which presented great opportunities for the traders in antiquities and artworks. This situation led to the enrichment of the collections of American antique dealers and businessmen. Inspired by the model of the European merchant-patron, some of them saw the art of the old continent as the symbol of an achieved economic success and a social position conquered by self-made men. This is the case of Randolph Hearst, one of the richest American tycoons, at the head of a veritable publishing empire. A profile of him, however arbitrary, was outlined by Orson Welles and Herman J. Mankiewicz for their famous *Citizen Kane* (1941).

Hearst was inspired by the activity of contemporary antiquarian and architects, such as Stanford White (1853-1903),

who gathered architectural pieces and drawings from Europe. Likewise, Hearst started to acquire salvages or entire sections of European historical buildings to enrich his monumental Californian residence, in the shape of a majestic castle on San Simeon's hills (Figure 2). Hearst also bought pieces from White's apartment in New York, in the sale following the death of the architect in 1906, including a precious, carved Italian ceiling which covers the Doge's suite in the Hearst Castle.

Hearst's antiquarian mania fed up the construction of his social, political, and economical identity (Levkoff, 2008). As underlined in the autobiography of his wife, the Californian actress Marion Davies, Hearst did not "like paintings so much. It was antique furniture, then armor, then tapestries, and then paintings last" (Davies, 1975, p. 181). This antiquarian preference was linked to the pragmatically approach of a self-made businessman, which valued objects and architecture in terms of their materiality. Although his collection comprised several paintings by masters or antique furniture, original pieces were often mixed with in-style reproductions, often suggesting the importance of economical convenience and visual enjoyment over the 'aura'. For instance, he tried to buy Italian marble fountains for the Castle park but, after realizing that the shipping and import taxes would make the deal inconvenient, he opted for US-made cheaper reproductions. On other occasions, along with his architect Julia Morgan (1872-1957), he had no qualms about modifying original pieces to adapt them to the rooms of his Castle, or simply to his personal taste.

Hearst purchased several Gothic cloisters in Spain, at the suggestion of Arthur Byne and Mildred Stapley. Respectively architect and writer, they were authors of several books, more properly catalogues, on Spanish architecture (Byne & Stapley, 1920). In 1924, they were financed by Hearst to find, evaluate and acquire portions of Spanish buildings to be incorporated into his Californian castle project. In particular, through his architect

Fig. 3 Unknown, *The monastery of Sacramenia*. B. Davis Schwartz Memorial, William Randolph Hearst Archive, LIU Post. Courtesy Long Island University.



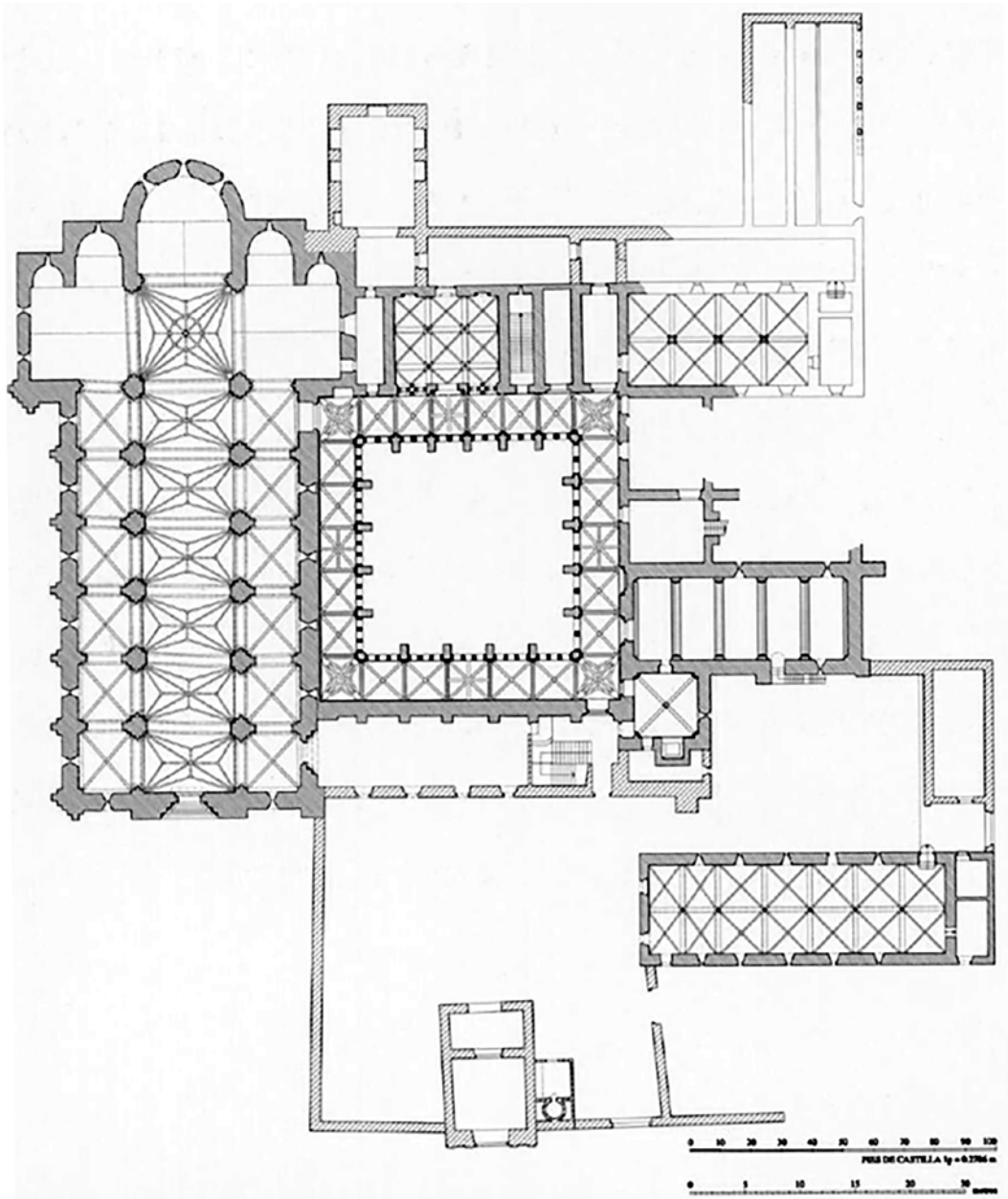


Fig. 4 Unknown, *Plan of the monastery of Sacramenia before the relocation* (Merino de Cáceres, 2003, p. 125).

Julia Morgan, Hearst asked the Bynes to find a “big, fine Gothic cloister – the bigger and finer the better” (Randolph, 1924). The response of the antiquarians was not long in coming and in July 1925, Byne bought an ancient cloister on Hearst’s behalf, who had it rebuilt within a museum of medieval art at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. The whole operation was carried out in antagonism with John Davison Rockefeller Jr. who, in the same years (1925-38), was donating antiques to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, forming the core of The Cloisters Museum (Rorimer, 1972; Barnet, 2005). Soon after, Hearst asked the Bynes for an additional cloister. In October 1925, they communicated to have found another monastery. It was the monastery of Santa María of Sacramenia, which had been built in the 12th century for a community of Cistercian monks under the patronage of Alfonso VII (Merino de Cáceres, 2003) (Figure 3).

Through Byne, Hearst purchased the cloister, the Chapter room, and the large refectory, which could be easily converted into an exhibition space, while the church remained on site, mutilated (Figure 4).

The blocks forming the walls and vaults of the monastery were numbered, disassembled, packed with straw, and closed in some 11.000 wooden crates. Loaded on a ship, the pieces of the monastery crossed the ocean. Unfortunately, the cargo was stopped at USA customs to avoid the contagion of an epidemic that was raging in Spain. For three months, 23 men uninterruptedly opened the thousands of crates, burned the straw used for packaging, and put the stones back into the crates.

The whole operation was carried out summarily, undermining the order of the numeration which had been attributed to the pieces. The delay was also increased by the disastrous effects of the Great Depression of 1929, which profoundly changed the world economic situation. Hearst had to correct his plans and abandoned the cloister to its fate.



Fig. 5 Unknown, *The stones of the Sacramenia cloister after it was bought to be rebuilt in Miami in 1952* (Merino de Cáceres & Martínez Ruiz, 2003, p. 447).

The crates remained in a Brooklyn warehouse until 1952, when two entrepreneurs, William Edgemon and Raymond Moss, bought them with the idea of building a tourist attraction in Miami (Figures 5, 6). This venture lasted for years and gradually eroded their finances. Moreover, the loss of drawings and documents illustrating the original position of the stones and their correspondence with the boxes forced the workers to follow criteria of contingent opportunity rather than philological authenticity. Some parts were even discarded and used elsewhere. The reconstruction, which costed about 20 million dollars, lasted for 19 months and integrated pieces from both other European monasteries and local artisans. The *Time* Magazine reported that “the master mason who supervised the job called it ‘the greatest jigsaw puzzle in history’” (Unknown, 1954, January 11th). The result is as picturesque as disrespectful of the original status of the cloister. Those who visit the monastery today in Miami, a dynamic and multi-ethnic city,

are convinced that they are standing in front of an authentic Medieval Spanish building made of authentic stones quarried, sculpted, and assembled in old Europe. On the contrary, those who know its history may consider it just a fake.

FROM ARCHITECTURE TO OBJECT

Although Byne had described the monastery to be purchased with words, drawings, and photographs (Larkin, 2005), Hearst's cultural and geographical distance promoted the acquisition of the building in the perspective of a sort of artificial dynastic construction.

Fig. 6 Unknown, *The stones of the Sacramenia cloister in Miami, Florida, in August 1952*. Private Archive.



Fig. 7 A postcard portraying the statue of Alfonso VII in the rebuilt cloister of Miami, Florida. Private Archive.



The comparison between the king Alfonso VII, the patron of the Cistercian monastery celebrated in its sculptural apparatus (Figure 7), and the American businessman, who intended to donate the complex to the University, corresponded to the construction of Hearst's social identity. In line with the process that the American sociologist economist Thorstein Bunde Veblen (1899) defined "conspicuous consumption", collecting was also based on the visual exer-

cise of power. This celebrative feature was manifested above all in architecture, the most social of the arts, which was often used as a persuasive tool to celebrate and fix individual pre-eminence, prompting dynamics of social persuasion (Bunde Veblen, 1989)². This interpretation stresses the encomiastic eloquence of architecture of which Hearst was rather aware, as confirmed by the amount of architectures and salvages used in the construction and furnishing of his sumptuous residences, including his ambitious Californian castle. In the light of these considerations, the story of the Sacramenia monastery stimulates a reflection on the concept of fake. The reference to this definition requires an analysis of the building's transformation, to evaluate the distance between the primitive and the final form. Indeed, the monastery was subjected to a series of actions, each embodying intentions and symbolisms that contributed to change the meaning of the building and reduced the complexity of architecture to the individuality of objects. Architecture is presumed to escape the definition of bourgeois work (Birindelli, 1983, pp. 128, 129) with which the historian Massimo Birindelli qualified the works which present a precise spatial "delimitation" and a consistent "mobility". An ordinary painting, depicted on an easel, framed, sold, and placed in a living-room or a gallery, remains available to many uses and displacements.

Architectural works, instead, cannot be easily "delimitated" since they are "rooted" in a place and designed for a specific community and time. While critics have developed categories and tools for the interpretation of "bourgeois works", architecture, so radically linked to its place and time, is often difficult to read in terms of forms and socio-economical relationships which no longer belong to our age. This chronic lack of critical investigative tools, which surfaces in the difficulty of recognizing, documenting, and representing architecture, can be ascribed to the growing tendency to approach a building as if it were a product of industrial design. The assignment of a furnishing role to the ancient stones of the monastery can be framed in this scenery, too.

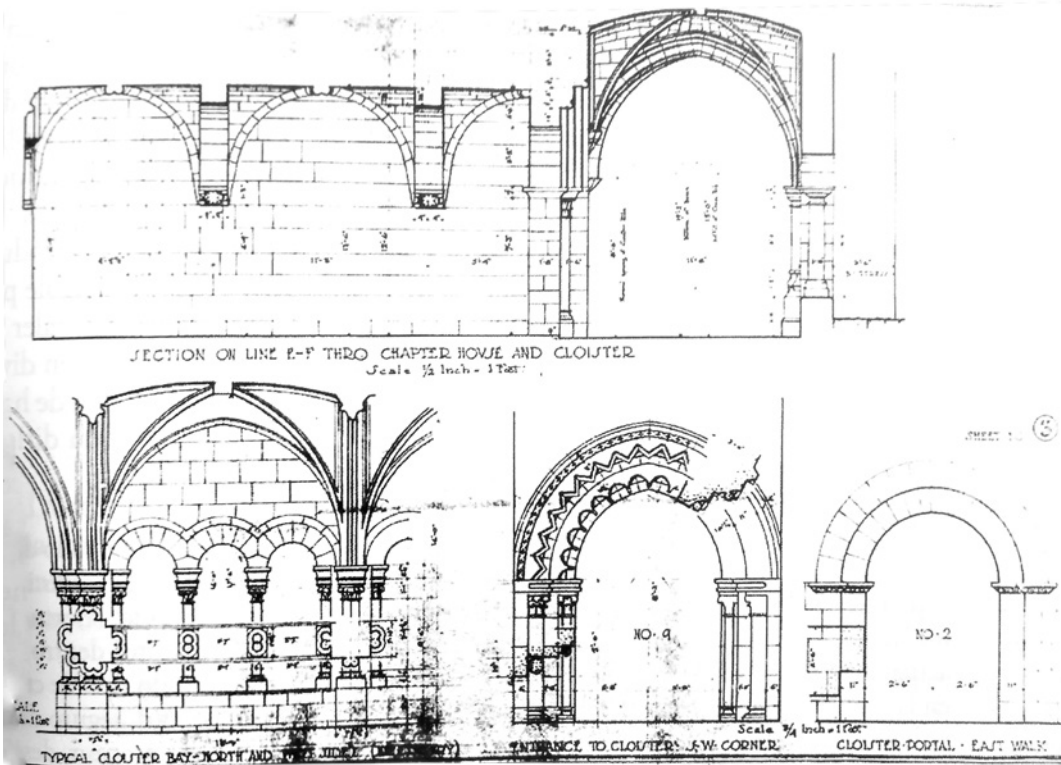


Fig. 8 Arthur Byne, *Drawing for the disassembling of the chapter hall of the Sacramenia monastery* (Merino de Cáceres & Martínez Ruiz, 2003, p. 441).

Turning a building into a portable “bourgeois work” – without denying its authenticity, which is what makes the transformation a pure display of power– requires some fundamental actions to reshape the architecture according to a logic of industrial production. When the workers numbered the stones of the cloister in Spain, they transferred the collective value of a unitary work to a graphic and numerical code, a generic aggregative layout (Figure 8). When the blocks were taken apart, they acquired an individual identity, independent from collective categories, such as ‘wall’ or ‘vault’.

When the blocks were packed, they were standardized by forcefully adapting them to the form of the crates, the whole building symbolically turned into an industrial assembly kit. These strategies ensured a physical and mental control over the whole work by cancelling the primitive identity of pieces and allowing their relocation in space.

Like a sort of magic spell, their architectural essence was somehow reduced and entrusted to drawings and notes onto two-dimensional sheets. It is no coincidence that, after the loss of the layout, the stones were assembled freely, resulting in a different shape, with pieces redundant.

SUM OR TOTAL? ANALOGICAL READINGS

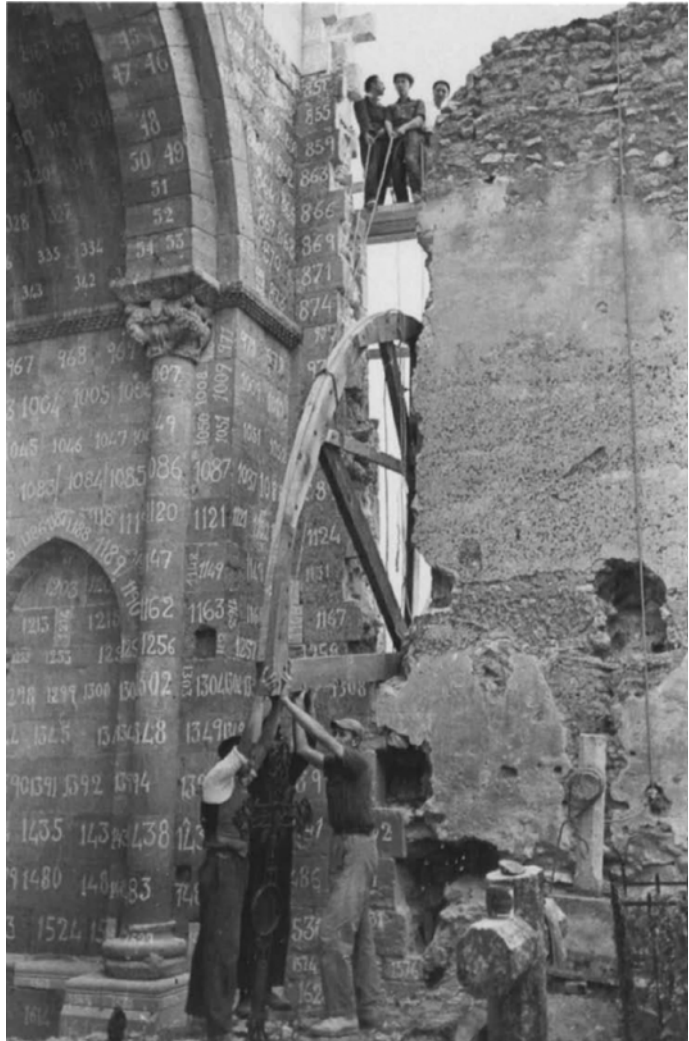
When discussing the actions involving the monastery, authors cannot but use heterogeneous terms such as translocation, grafting, hybridization, dismemberment, disarticulation, metaphor, translation, metaphor, and so on. Almost challenging the disciplinary limits, ordinary architectural terms resulted to be unable to frame and define the specific sense of the material and immaterial phenomena occurred to the Sacramenia cloister.

In this sense, they need to be analysed using analogies with other disciplines, such as biology, mathematics, or linguistics. The organic conception of architecture, which implies a direct analogy between the building and the human body, dates back at least to the early Renaissance treatises; however, it continues to find proselytes among those who regretted the introduction of the Napoleonic meter to the detriment of anthropometric units or those who design buildings upon human proportions.

It is therefore natural that architects often derive their terminology and their 'yardstick' from anatomy. Looking at anatomy, the removal of a piece from the body corresponds to a mutilation of the building, while the addition of a new part corresponds to a prosthesis. In this perspective, what remains of the monastery in Spain is an architectural stump, while the recomposed cloister in Miami was subjected to grafts, prostheses, and implants of elements from other buildings (generally other European monasteries).

The result was therefore an altered building, a kind of 'Frankenstein's monster' of architecture. Nevertheless, also

Fig. 9 Unknown, *The Numbering and disassembling of stones of the apse of San Martín de Fuentidueña, to be shipped in New York, 1958* (Barnet & Wu, 2005, p. 38). (1954, January 11th). Jigsaw Puzzle. Time Magazine. Retrieved July 7, 2021 from <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,819355,00.html>



this terminology seems to be linked to figures and conditions which belong to the past when compared to the current conception of the 'augmented body' inspired by the cyborgs of science fiction literature.

From a genetic point of view, the insertion of alien elements in the reconstruction of the structure in Miami has produced a translocation, or a variation in the genetic heritage of the building, due to an incorrect exchange and re-arrangement of its constituent parts.

In this case, it is clear that the sum of the parts of the building is different from its original unit, as the operation that led to its re-composition is not commutative: indeed, when the order of the elements changes, the result varies, too. However, more than mathematics, linguistic can reveal something more on the building's transformation process. In fact, that of architecture is a proper language (often particularly eloquent) with its own grammatical and logical rules. The numbering and the isolation of stones, a frequent process in the relocation of architectures (Figure 9), reduce the complexity of the architectural language to the simplicity of its singular terms which, isolated, lost the meaning of the whole text.

The transport of the monastery from one place to another led to a change in the receptors of language, which can be identified in the users of the building and their perceptions, from the Spanish monks living, praying, and working within the walls of the monastery to the tourists who visit the attraction in Florida. The change of interlocutors was also accompanied by a translation process.

It is no coincidence that the word 'translation' is understood in its double meaning of physical and linguistic displacement. According to the philosopher Jacques Derrida (1979, p. 102), works survive only if they are both translatable and untranslatable, as the work must necessarily lose a part of itself during the translation.

Furthermore, for the philosopher, it is always hard to trace a boundary between the original and its translation, because the original has already lost its alleged purity. Indeed, the original is itself a translation: the Spanish monastery, even before the transoceanic transfer, was the result of adaptations and architectural stratifications that had already translated its primitive image.

Nevertheless, the translation, or the re-composition of the building in Miami, has allowed the work to remain alive and, at the same time, to invent and define, by contrast, its original purity. Indeed, the reconstruction of the building

allows to experience a philological integrity that is given by the sense of difference:

The original calls for a translation which establishes a nostalgia for the innocence and the life it never had. [...] The supplementary translation which appears as a violation of the purity of the work is actually the possibility of that very purity. (Wigley, 1989, p. 8)

CONCLUSION

The condition of the Spanish monastery in Miami is as unique as the characters and historical events that brought it from Spain to Florida. Today the building is presented to public as an original Spanish monastery. It hosts religious services and is appreciated as a favourite location for marriages (Figure 10). On the other hand, the story of how it arrived at Miami, which has become a common heritage, symbolizes a disinhibited way of intending collectorship and entrepreneurship that was somehow typical of American upper classes. In this sense, it is representative of the way USA culture has been defining itself in relationship with its controversial European roots.

If in architecture we call 'fake' those cases in which there is an evident intention to deceive, re-presenting an architectural work or a part of it that imitates the original or suggests a non-existent antiquity, then the monastery cannot be considered as such. But if by fake we mean the result of a process in which the original building changes place, shape and meaning, then the monastery is a fake. But how correct is this judgment? Certainly, the monastery is neither a copy nor an imitation. Moreover, most of the materials it was rebuilt with are authentic. This fact certainly contributes, in some way, to keeping alive a part of its aura, of its authenticity. At the same time, the authenticity of such a 'second-life' of monastery is constantly negotiated by the memory of its 'first-life', which is furtherly idealized by its absence. The relocation of the

cloister from Sacramenia to Miami and its consequent transformation is an extreme case, of course, but the extremity of its condition seems to call for a new definition of authenticity while, at the same time, it perfectly embodies those translation processes which often amplify the myth of the original.

NOTES

1 Adrian Forty (2004, pp. 308, 309) recalls how, in architecture, truth can be expressed in three ways: the 'expressive truth', when a work is faithful to the spirit of the person who created it; the 'structural truth', when the appearance conforms to the structural system; the 'historical truth', when a work expresses the ideas and the level of development of its era.

2 Hearst was infatuated with the coffered ceilings and the *alfarjes* of Granada and Guadix; in the 153 rooms of his castle of San Simeón, he accumulated more than one hundred Gothic, Mudejar and Renaissance ceilings. See: <https://www.elindependientedegranada.es/cultura/granada-castillo-ciudadano-kane> (March 21, 2021).

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