

Ruins That Speak: Ageing Bodies, Collapsing Cities

An interview with Salvatore Settis by Celia Ghyka

PhD, Associate Professor, "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, Romania
celia.ghyka@uauiim.ro

Salvatore Settis is a most distinguished and highly reputed Italian art historian and archaeologist. His name resonates with some of the most important art history and humanities research centers in the world. Specialized in Italian Renaissance and antiquity, in 1994 he became director of the Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities (now the Getty Research Institute) in Los Angeles, a position that he held until 1999, when he returned to Pisa, where he would lead the Scuola Normale Superiore from 1999 to 2010. Since 2010 he has been Chair of the Scientific Council of the Musée du Louvre. He is also a member of the Académie Française, the Academies of Sciences in Berlin and Munich, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, and the American Philosophical Society.

Having followed for years professor Settis's publications and exhibitions, I had the honor to meet him in Pisa, where he generously accepted to have this conversation for the present issue of our journal, dedicated to a topic that he had been pursuing for decades now, in many of his writings and exhibitions, mentioned in our conversation that follows.

The question of time and its fluctuating meaning with respect to artworks, objects, architectures is always also a reflection of our present conscience, both individual and social. Rem Koolhaas, his longtime collaborator, remarks how the exhibitions imagined and curated by Settis "use antiquity to make arguments about our contemporary condition." Our conversation touches this contemporary condition defined by crisis, decay and collapse, that alternates with the revival, renaissance or recovery of meaning — a decline that directly mirrors, both metaphorically and physically, the concurrent frailty and vigor of our human condition as mortals.

La ville en ruine

Celia Ghyka: Ruin and its ambivalent quality — both presence and absence, as reminder of a lost totality summoning this absence — have been themes that come up often in your books, articles, and exhibitions. During your tenure as Director of the Getty Research Institute, two important events have been organized, directly and indirectly tackling the subject of ruins — the exhibition and book *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (curated by Michael S. Roth, Claire Lyons and Charles Merewether, 1997), and the book *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century* (Michael S. Roth and Charles Salas, 2001).

This irresistible attraction of ruins (*Ruinenlust*) as allegories of time and destiny (collective or individual) and the particularities of such an attraction in different cultures have been in the center of the colloquium from 2013 and later the volume that you coordinated, together with Monica Preti, at the Louvre: *Villes en ruine: images, mémoires, métamorphoses*.¹ In retrospect, this title is prophetic: your warning that although the hypothesis of war seemed far away, in Europe and elsewhere, this recurring affirmation is now more relevant than ever: the city is in ruins. Could you perhaps comment on the actuality of this idea?

¹ Monica Preti and Salvatore Settis, *Villes en ruine: images, mémoires, métamorphoses* (Paris: Hazan & Musée du Louvre, 2015).

Salvatore Settis: In any cultural horizon, ruins are an element that is neither less frequent nor less necessary than architecture or other cultural creations. One shouldn't think only about the ruins of war, like those that are today devastating Ukraine and Gaza, but also at ruins that are produced by time or neglect. Or at ruins that result from social or economic macro-phenomena, like de-industrialization that leaves behind a trail of abandoned factories, bleak working-class neighborhoods, or rapidly failing social services. One should also think about the end of mandatory military service: dozens and dozens of barracks have been left unused and difficult to reuse. Other ruins are born out of the mediocre quality of residential architecture: blocks of flats badly designed, poorly built, made of inadequate materials are gradually left by people that become more well-off, and often remain empty, squatted, or occupied by a poorer population.

In fact, we must always cohabitate with ruins. Firstly (but not only), with the urban ruins. This capillary, diffuse and disturbing presence invites or even imposes the search for symbolic meanings, sometimes resulting in imaginative reuses, explorations, and classifications. Their basic component is always the passing of time, that each ruin incarnates, exposes, and defies. The only medicine for this disease of civilization would be to destroy every ruin, as soon as it starts to form, but this seems impossible, since the transition to ruination is gradual and the initial moment is never entirely clear. The most effective metaphor would be that of the human body: there is no remedy for its constant ageing. The same goes for the social body and for the urban body. The signs of age in a declining human body are mirrored in the ruins that articulate the body of the city.

Ghosts

CG: This issue of our journal is entitled *Ozymandias 2.0. Afterlives of the Architectural Ruin*. The title evidently evokes Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," but also invokes Aby Warburg's famous formula of the *Nachleben der Antike*. We wanted to expand the notion of afterlife in exploring the contemporary meanings and questions raised by architectural ruins. I have noticed how in many of your texts, the topic of the Warburgian "ghost" emerges as a topos. Would you say that this is or may be a rhetorical formula par excellence in any discourse about ruins?

SS: What was named *Nachleben der Antike* in the time of Warburg can now be described as a highly dramatic alternation of loss of meaning — to which corresponds a freezing of the artistic formulae of what is left from antiquity — succeeded by a gradual or sudden recovery of meaning, starting from the same formulae that seemed, for centuries, inert and dead. They re-acquire life, authority, currency. This improvised reappropriation of an artistic heritage of Antiquity (like, for instance, in the Florentine Renaissance) cannot be explained other than by a sympathetic process, an act of *Einfühlung* that implies the rediscovery of meaning (and thus of the connected emotions) behind the rigidity of a formula that had become out of use. In this sense the surviving fragments of a more antique culture are "ghosts"; they always imply death, yet they may come back to life, be resurrected or re-born (as is literally the case of the Re-naissance in its neo-latin etymology). These are, as Warburg used to say, "ghost stories for adults — *für ganz Erwachsene*."

Universality of ruins

CG: Your article from 2011, *La nécessité des ruines: les enjeux du classique*² looks at the "function of ruins as symptoms and guardians of historical consciousness" and questions at the same time the universality of the cultural status of ruins, while comparing the European tradition to different other cultural interpretations of the past, such as in India, China, and Japan.

2 Salvatore Settis, "La nécessité des ruines: les enjeux du classique," *European Review of History : Revue européenne d'histoire* 18, 5-6 (2011): 717-740.

SS: For the Western tradition, ruins denote both a presence and an absence: they demonstrate, indeed *they are*, the point where the visible and the invisible meet. That which is invisible (or absent) is summoned up and accentuated by the fragmentation of ruins, their ‘useless’ and occasionally incomprehensible nature and their loss of purpose (or at least their original purpose). However, their obstinate visible presence demonstrates, far more than their loss of utility, the longevity and indeed eternity of ruins and their victory over the ineluctable course of time.

As Chateaubriand argued in a famous passage from *Génie du Christianisme* (1802),³ “all men feel a secret attraction towards ruins,” because of a sense of the sublime evoked by the contrast between our human condition and the fall of great empires, to which the ruins bear witness. But perhaps Chateaubriand was wrong, and that attraction or feeling is peculiar to culture in the European tradition. Perhaps ruins, the symbol of a faded past that is still present, are closely linked to that sequence of small and large rebirths, the regular death and reawakening of antiquity. It could be argued that this peculiarity (if such it is) was ultimately molded by an event that left its indelible mark on the history and cultural memory of what we call the West: the sudden, traumatic rift caused by the fall of Rome. If we are thinking of Romulus Augustulus and the date 476 AD, which only history textbooks consider to be fateful, then it really was “the inaudible end of an empire,” as Arnaldo Momigliano defined it. Yet the slow process of that end, the lingering death throes that commenced centuries beforehand, did involve a dramatic break with the past: the more or less contemporary (and definitive) collapse of a religion, a state and territorial organization, and a society with its own institutions, values, and cultural and behavioral paradigms. What remained became inextricably fused with the thoughts, values, and memories of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Although there have been rifts and discontinuities in the histories of all peoples, nothing in the other great cultural traditions, such as India, China and Japan, quite compares with this “end of the ancient world” (partly because of the magnitude of the stage on which it occurred).

A recent study by Wu Hung⁴ allows us to make a brief comparison with China. It appears that the sense of attachment to ruins has no place in Chinese culture. Paintings of ruins only appear very rarely and very late and are by painters that were to some extent influenced by Europe, such as Fan Qi (1616-1694). No narrative scene was ever set against a backdrop of ruins, nor was there any representation of a man visiting, observing, and reflecting upon ruins. A traditional genre of Chinese poetry, called *huaigu* [meditation on or lament to the past] would appear to lend itself to descriptions of ruins and reflections on them, but in reality it never produced anything comparable with the European tradition. Two words, which signify two fundamental concepts, are suitable for discussing ruins: *xu* and *ji*. *Xu* means “vacuum,” “desolation,” “destruction,” and can be found in some *huaigu*, as well as paintings also belonging to the *huaigu* genre, and these contain the poetic experiences and meditations of travelers. But the “ruins” mentioned in the texts or depicted in the paintings are never abandoned buildings, but rather uncultivated fields and dying trees: in other words, ruins of nature and not of human constructions. The other concept, *ji*, refers to ruins as “traces” of something else, particularly historical figures. As Wu Hung writes, “whereas *xu* emphasizes the cancellation or concealment of all traces of mankind, *ji* demonstrates their survival and display.” For these purposes, anything (a hill, tree, river or temple) could become *ji* once an association has been established with an event or person from the past. Once again, however, the artworks deal in the great majority of cases with elements of a natural landscape rather than ruins. Only in a few cases immediately following the fall of the Ming dynasty were scenes depicting a *Visit to a stele* painted. These steles had commemorative inscription to

3 François-René de Chateaubriand, *Génie du christianisme* (III, V, 3) (Paris: Migneret imprimeur, 1802), 169.

4 Wu Hung, “Shitao (1642-1707) et la conception chinoise traditionnelle des ruines,” in *Villes en ruine: images, mémoires, métamorphoses*, eds. Monica Preti and Salvatore Settis (Paris: Hazan & Musée du Louvre, 2015), 84-108.

Ming officials; they were evocations of the past, but the steles were set in the landscape and depicted as perfectly intact and not damaged (although the inscription is not always legible). In these images, the passing of time is not represented by the steles, but by the twisted and withered trees in a “ruinous” state. Once again, the pathos of time and history is entrusted to nature and not to signs of culture. The steles denote the past but not the passing of time. Even Chinese antiquarians, who have a tradition much more ancient than Europeans have, did not collect steles, but rather ink rubbings as they were more interested in calligraphy. [...]

Nature also has a significant role in the Western cultural perception of ruins. Indeed, Georg Simmel⁵ (1919) argued that a ruin constitutes the synthesis between nature (principally understood as a destructive force) and culture, and “a ruin’s fascination is ultimately to be found in the realization that man’s creations can be perceived as products of nature.” But ruins can tell us things that natural objects cannot: they remind us of their ancient builders and users, but they also make us think about those who neglected, sacked, and destroyed them. The fact that some of them have been conserved, visited, and restored as ruins also reminds us of those who up until the present day have attempted to give a meaning in the here and now to those crumbling remnants of the past. In this, the tradition of Western Europe is distinct from the Byzantine one: there were of course ruins in the Eastern Empire, and sometimes (but very rarely) they were mentioned in texts but never depicted in art. As Byzantines called themselves *Rhomaioi* (Romans) and correctly considered themselves the legitimate successors of the Roman Empire, their sense of absolute and unquestionable continuity deprived the ruins of that pathos and the fullness of meaning we perceive in the West. Ruins were almost never understood as symbols of change from one age to another, not even after the two occasions on which Constantinople fell (the crusader invasion of 1204 and the Turkish one of 1453).

We can tentatively refer to a counterargument concerning a much more remote context. The fall of the pre-Columbian empires in Mexico and Peru was comparable with the “end of the ancient world” in Western Europe, in terms of its drastic and sudden transition from one world to another and from one religion to another. The civilizations overrun by the conquistadores left imposing ruins behind them, and for more recent generations these have regained their much-warranted fame. And yet we cannot speak of a preoccupation with ruins comparable with that of the European tradition. The reasons are exactly the opposite to those relating to the Byzantine civilization: there was what might be called an “excess of continuity” in Byzantium (as in China), whereas there was an “excess of discontinuity” in the forced transition from pre-Columbian America (in a few very particular situations this effect was lessened, as in the last Mayan kingdoms that resisted the Spanish until the beginning of the eighteenth century and the Hopi of Arizona who rejected assimilation and have kept their religion alive until the present day). The nostalgia that the end of those civilizations undoubtedly generated did not have any means of expressing itself, nor was there any means of handing its own distinctive voice down the generations, precisely because of the sudden and radical elimination of anyone who could have developed that sentiment. When archaeologists rediscovered those ruins and started to study them very much later, the outlook was irredeemably that of archaeology in the European mold, itself a development from sixteenth and seventeenth-century antiquarianism. In other words, there does not appear to be an “indigenous” feeling for the ruins in this cultural environment, but simply an “exogenous” one induced by the adoption of European cultural elements. For instance, Fernando de Alba Ixtlilxochitl (1568-1648), a *mestizo* with royal Aztec blood, did describe the ruins of the Texcoco Palace, which were also depicted in Quinatzin’s map, but he did so from the perspective of his Europeanized and Christian educational background. He evoked the works and achievements of the Greeks and Romans, while claiming that those of the American peoples were no less significant, “even though the passage of time and the destruction of my ancestors’ states has plunged their history into obscurity.” This “exogenous” and comparative

5 Georg Simmel, “Die Ruine,” *Philosophische Kultur* (1911), 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1919), 125-133.

approach to ruins is more similar to the Chinese one than to the European one, which is by its very nature “endogenous.” The same can be said of Japan, where the depiction of ruins in relation to the history of the imperial family commenced around 1880, well after the country opened up to Western influences.

Seemingly the sentiment attached to ruins (or, to put it another way, a complex discourse on ruins) is particular to Western culture, and it could be argued that it is not so much linked to the fall of empire in itself as to the unique balance between continuity and discontinuity following the collapse of the Roman Empire. This sentiment is principally embodied in ruins (because of their mix of presence and absence), but also extends to languages, behavior, institutions, and the endless traces of the ancient, “classical” culture we all often unwittingly carry around with us. This explanation is also valid for the periodic rebirth of the “classical” as a “cyclical form,” which is exclusive to European cultural history. However, these cycles are the other side of the same coin, given that the rebirths always feed off fragments of the past (ruins) that are constantly poised between life and death. The pathos of one’s own tradition is dominant in other civilizations, while in our civilization the pathos that dominates is for ruins, the incurable rift that has to be healed: rebirth as the indispensable condition for tradition and memory.

Critical role of ruins

CG: In several of your texts, you demonstrate how this obsessive relation with the symbolic but also physical, material decay of a past that is “classical,” hence considered valuable, is specifically European — this is a central topic of your book (now, may I say, a classic in itself) *Il futuro del classico* (2004, translated and published in many languages and countries).

However, this once Eurocentric perspective seems to have lately merged with a global perspective, dominated by the economic value assigned to historical artefacts and architectures that coincides, sadly, with an increased generalized violence that threatens to destroy the lives of individuals and collectives, as well as their architectural and cultural heritage. It seems that a part of our heritage is again, under assault, and while more and more ruins are produced every day, existing ruins (as cultural markers of a lost totality) are also menaced by disappearance (through looting, vandalization, total extinction).

Against this conflicting background of both exaltation (historicist obsessions with the past) and accelerated destruction, do you think that ruin could still play a critical role — both conceptually and physically, as a material object? Could it still act as an instrument of knowledge, as revelator of coexisting temporalities?

Also, besides the obvious menace of synthetic and entirely artificial memorial landscapes that have spread globally (the make-believe historical sites, physical but also virtual simulations of famous cities or monuments), there is also the question of ruin reproductions (of once existent ruins, now vanished entirely), and of their commodification that dissolves them into (touristic) mass consumption. It is a danger that you warn about in your book *If Venice dies*.⁶ Could we speak about a double or second death of ruins?

SS: The paradox of a monumental ruin, let’s say the Colosseum, is that it is at the same time dead (it does not serve any more its original purpose) and alive (it still exists, and in the meantime, it has acquired new meanings, new uses). Its own survival for millennia becomes a reason for its attraction and interest, that pushes the individual ruin towards the uncertain regions of symbols, allegories, cultural memory. But what happens instead with the “everyday” ruins that emerge all around us, ruins of houses, banks, workshops, stores?

6 Salvatore Settis, *Se Venezia muore* (Einaudi, 2014); English edition: *If Venice Dies*, trans. André Naffis-Sahely (New York: New Vessel Press, 2016).

The ruins of ancient Pompei are also houses, but throughout their long obliteration and then through the cultural rituals of excavation and tourism, they have acquired a monumental status; even the most modest houses in Pompei resemble more to the Colosseum than to houses just as modest (and abandoned) from a contemporary city.

But what can we do with urban neighborhoods that are emptied, barracks deserted for decades, hospitals built thirty years ago that have never been functional (frequent in Southern Italy)? Certainly, these are not monuments, and should wait a few centuries in order for them to become so. But they are also ruins. What do they tell us? Do they send us the same message as the monumental ruin, or do they speak of something different?

To seriously discuss about ruins, one should begin with what unites all ruins, those of ancient Rome and those of yesterday: the balance between past and present, between useful and useless, between presence and absence, visible and invisible, death and resurrection. Bringing the idea of ruin itself on the ground of individual and social experience is the indispensable premise for learning to see the ruins while they are born around us. This is necessary in order to fight the mechanism of repression (in a Freudian sense) of the new ruins that we tend not to see because we know in our hearts that they are a symptom not just of decay, but of death.

Copies, series and multiples

CG: We evoked the question of the copy and its relationship with the ruin. Especially in today's context of actual or potential disappearance of architectural heritage (already ruined or not), but also because of the impossibility of displacement of certain historical artefacts (I include here the disputed world heritage hosted by major collections or museums), you suggested that copy is not only acceptable, but also advisable. Do you think that this could be a solution? You mentioned the question of perception (in relation with architecture), could you perhaps comment a little further on this?

Lingering on the previous question, you suggested that a good copy may have positive consequences, both conceptually and artistically. I wonder how we could define a good copy in this respect. How would a good copy be different from a simulacrum? And since we are speaking about ruins, how could — or should — copies still bear the mnestic functions of ruins?

SS: As you know, in 2015 the new venue of the Fondazione Prada in Milan, built after a project by Rem Koolhaas, opened with a show of antique Greco-Roman art. This was a bold and unexpected choice, given that the Fondazione Prada deals with great seriousness and success with contemporary art. When Miuccia Prada asked me to choose a topic, I suggested the copies of Greek art in the antique Roman world. The exhibition was curated by me and by Anna Anguissola, on a layout by the same Koolhaas. In preparing the project for the show I could have (like many do) associated antique works with works by contemporary artists, even commissioned for that purpose; I could have, even, pointed towards the memorial function of copies. But I preferred another register: showing, through the conceptual (but also aesthetic) category of seriality, one of the many tangencies between the ancient world and our own.

Replicas after Greek 5th or 4th centuries B.C. artworks, that were so common a few centuries later in Rome or in other cities in the Roman world, did not *substitute* the respective originals, but they *multiplied* the original while *varying* it, thus showing the fecundity of an artistic creation and drawing awareness to the variations that it could bring about. I think that this antique experience might be a precious antidote to the current misconception of our times, when the copy, and especially the digital copy, “faithfully certifies” the original, and somehow substitutes and makes it even more visible. It is never like this. Confronted with a copy, I think that the right stance would be for one to capture and analyze the deviations from the original. The lost originals of the sculptures by Polykleitos or Praxiteles, of which we may have a feeble idea through their Roman copies, trigger a cognitive process but they do not bring back something that is no more.

Transfer of *aura*

CG: I am referring here also to all the new technical possibilities related to digital reproductions. In your text for *Serial/Portable Classic* (“Supremely Original. Classical Art as Serial, Iterative, Portable”) you reference an extraordinary premonitory passage of Paul Valéry from 1928, quoted by Benjamin in the later version of the *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Both Valéry and Benjamin anticipated the radical shifts brought by modern technology to the definition of art. But could we read these prophecies as applied to the already produced objects, endowed with auratic qualities, such as ruins?

I will dwell a little longer on this question of the aura. You suggested in our conversation (and commented elsewhere in *Supremely Original*) that, in relation with the antique production of copies in the Greco-Roman world, the choral and paradigmatic nature of their seriality allowed for a transfer of the *aura* from the unique to the multiples. I find this captivating, since it is a reading of Antiquity that radically changes our image of a heroic dimension of authorship. I wonder if this could ever be possible with the copies made through digital reproductions realized with contemporary technologies (including recreation of the lost pieces)?

SS: As I wrote in that study, when Benjamin spoke about multiple originals, he surely had cinema in mind, displacing the concept of *aura* on the side of uniqueness. The *loss of aura* mentioned by Benjamin is not a sort of nostalgia for the uniqueness, but rather the transfer of aura (and thus of authenticity) from the original to the series, a movement that is consubstantial with the decline of authorship, and as such disposes of concepts such as creativity, genius, eternal values, mystery. Benjamin was not so naïve as to believe that the imperfect photographic reproductions from those years would endanger the *aura* of the original, especially in a point that for him and for us is crucial: the relationship between the masses and art. Going to see a Picasso in a gallery, writes Benjamin, is “very reactionary,” while going to see Chaplin in a cinema is “very progressive.”

Exhibitions as critical and poetic vehicles

CG: You have authored a few major exhibitions that have all been somehow related, explicitly, with architectural ruins. *Serial/Portable Classic* (Fondazione Prada, 2015/2016 in Milan and Venice), *I Marmi Torlonia* (2019-2020, Rome, Musei Capitolini, and in June 2024 at the Louvre), *Recycling Beauty* (2022, Fondazione Prada, Milan).

I would like to ask if you could speak a little about your experience with exhibitions and display, as well as about your collaboration with architects in imagining these exhibitions (I refer here of course especially at your collaboration with Rem Koolhaas and David Chipperfield).

Exhibitions seem to me to act as precipitators of a knowledge that becomes tangible, visible, and in this process, they also become poetic devices and vehicles for thought. They are also fun to make, as one should not rule out the playful dimension in any intellectual and scholar activity. I noticed that you use in your texts the figure of the short-circuit, which, I think, may be an accurate rhetorical figure for what an exhibition is — would you agree or expand this thought?

SS: The exhibitions that you quoted have been born out of different circumstances, but I have been implicated in all of them not out of my initiative, but on commission. About the two twin and simultaneous exhibitions *Serial Classic* (in Milan) and *Portable Classic* (in the Venice venue of the Fondazione Prada) I already mentioned that the commissioner was Miuccia Prada, then assisted by Germano Celant, a great art historian and my friend, who unfortunately died in 2020 (he was one of the first victims of the pandemic). As for *Recycling Beauty* (2022-2023), that

7 Salvatore Settis, “Supremely Original. Classical Art as Serial, Iterative, Portable,” in *Serial/Portable Classic: The Greek Canon and its Mutations*, eds. Salvatore Settis and Anna Anguissola (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2015), 65-68.

was again a commission by Miuccia Prada, and again I chose the topic, starting from another contemporary category, recycling, that was inflected exclusively via antique works.

In short, what in 2015 had been the category of seriality, was in 2023 the category of recycling or reuse. The case of the Torlonia marbles is very different: there the commission was essentially and via intermediaries, that of the Italian Ministry of Culture and the Fondazione Torlonia. It was about bringing back into the circuit, a century later, some of the works of the Torlonia Museum, opened around 1876 and closed around 1940. This was and is the largest private collection of classical art, by then out of the horizon and ignored by most. The exhibition had to concentrate on the objects of this collection, and only of this collection, and to outline a story starting from there.

In both cases, the relationship with architects has been for me of utmost importance: the layout is by itself able to incorporate the narrative and conceptual ideas of a curator — in these cases that was me. For the Torlonia exhibition, the architect of the first edition (Musei Capitolini, Roma) was David Chipperfield, of whom I particularly admire the Neues Museum in Berlin; for the second edition (Gallerie della Scala, Milan) the design was by Lucia Anna Iovieno. Both times, the dialogue with the architects has been essential, and the difference between the two spaces (the Milan venue was double in volume with respect to the Roman one) allowed to imagine a completely different relationship between the sculptures and the exhibition space. Again, a different show will be the third version of the Torlonia Marbles that will open next June 24th, in the Apartment of Anne of Austria in the Louvre.

The three Prada exhibitions quoted above have all been sculpture exhibitions, although in one case (*Portable Classic*) there have been some paintings and a few drawings. Here my dialogue with the layout has been with Rem Koolhaas, a dialogue that has progressed greatly from one exhibition to another. In a total mutual respect, with Rem we have found a perfect convergence in choosing the exhibiting language that gave the narrative rhythm of the specialist (what I had in mind) a strong communicative density that was in consonance with the expectations of Fondazione Prada's public, a public interested mostly in contemporary art. While fully leaving the exhibited works as antiquities, this layout showed them in a new light, a contemporary light. The predominantly young and very young public attending *Recycling Beauty* seems to have confirmed that Rem's exhibiting intuitions have enhanced my own conceptual idea without betraying it in the least, thoroughly understanding its generative roots.