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Conserving the Original:
Authenticity in Art Restoration

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ABSTRACT. Over the past few decades debates in the field of conservation have called into question the suppositions underpinning contemporary restoration theory and practice. Restorers seem to base their choices in the light of implicit ideas about the authenticity, identity and value of works of art, ideas that need to undergo a more systematic theoretical evaluation. I begin by focusing on the question of whether authenticity is fully established in the process of the creation of an artwork: namely, at its initial point of existence. If the answer is affirmative (1), we commit to the idea that authenticity is determined by the work's creator; thus, it is considered a given, exempt from historical flux. If the answer is negative (2), we take authenticity to be a combination of initial creation and temporal change; in this sense the work is considered a 'historical being'. These two conceptions come from opposite ontological perspectives on the identity of artworks. In examining them we will gain insight into how different conservation narratives can be considered and configured in conceptual terms. One's interpretation of what makes an artwork authentic will greatly influence how to go about preserving or restoring it.

1. Introduction. Two Paradigms in the Theory of Restoration

In 1816 Antonio Canova famously refused to restore the fragmentary Pantheon Frieze Lord Elgin had recently brought to England. In an attempt to have the statues and bas-reliefs retouched, Lord Elgin went to Rome to consult with the renowned artist, but Canova flatly declined. After examining the samples and acquainting himself with the entire collection, Canova declared that however badly these statues had suffered from time

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and barbarism, no one, not even he, could improve on the style of the original artist. "It would be sacrilege in him or any man to presume to touch them with a chisel", he claimed. Canova's reaction went against the convention of fully restoring antique sculptures prevailing at the time. His refusal was based on two fundamental principles: on the one hand, the necessity to preserve the authentic work of art by maintaining the aura of the artist's authorship, whose mastery, Canova claimed, "testified the perfection to which art had advanced under Phidias among the ancients"[2], on the other, the acceptance of damage incurred since the work's conception, inasmuch as physical evidence of the work's history conveys its authenticity.

In that same year, the Danish sculptor and collector Bertel Thorvaldsen completely restored the sculptures of the pediment of the *Temple of Aphaia* at Aegina (Greece), now belonging to the *Glyptothek* in Munich, including the addition of modern replacements of heads, drapery and armor, and completion of missing sections. As early as the late 19th century, these restorations were the subject of much controversy and were finally removed between 1963 and 1965, with a few critics arguing that the deletion of Thorvaldsen's additions sacrificed a nineteenth-century complex *Gesamtkunstwerk* for the sake of an ancient past.

Canova and Thorvaldsen's views exemplify opposing paradigms that have alternately informed restoration theory and practice since its 19th century inception: the absolute need to preserve the integrity of the original to assure the work's authenticity and the belief that the authenticity of a work is not established once and for all at the point of its inception. These paradigmatic perspectives can be expressed (and I refer to Ami Harbin 2008, on this) as 'static' and 'dynamic' view of authenticity, and invoke a familiar ontological dispute on whether an artwork is different from the physical object that it is.

In this paper, I argue that, upon examination, both paradigms prove to be defective in terms of restoration. They may, however, give us insights into how different restoration narratives and ethics can be re-thought and re-configured in conceptual terms.

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[2] Quoted in: Griffiths 1811, 277.

2. Restoration and Authenticity

Works of art are (among many other things) pieces of material testimony. They are fragments of the puzzle that is art history, and actors as much as witnesses. To fight against artworks' inevitable material degradation, preservation science, through conservation and restoration, is in charge of their up-keep. Conservation aims to prevent damage to a piece, and to reinforce it for the future; it safeguards the object in its current state by stabilizing it and preserving its integrity. Restoration actually alters the physical state of a work by rebuilding, repairing, repainting, or generally re-perfecting it, the main ambition being to restore the piece to its ideal state[3]. Restauration is thus much more controversial than conservation. If the distinction between natural aging and damage isn't vague, it is absolutely unclear what the *ideal* state of an artwork can be. The complexity of the matter explains why a consensus on an all-embracing definition of restoration has not yet been reached. As conservators Richmond and Bracker claim, the past few decades have indeed witnessed increasing discomfort within the profession with what appears to be a lack of rigorous self-analysis: conservation today needs to re-evaluate itself and acknowledge its need to engage in greater intellectual dialogue outside of the profession (Richmond & Bracker 2009, p. 15).

Out of the many theoretical questions that arise after a more thorough consideration of restoration (questions of ethics and aesthetics, as well as more specific notions on the identity of works of art) I begin by addressing one particular philosophical issue par excellence. My question is simple but the answer isn't: How far can restorers retouch without affecting the authenticity of a work of art? Any attempt to answer this question requires a study of the limits of restoration. However, it first requires an understanding of the significance of 'authenticity', and what it means to restorers, artists, and society as a whole.

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[3] After the 15th Triennial Conference held in September 2008, the International Council of Museums Committee of Conservation (ICOM-CC) adopted a resolution on a terminology which defines the term 'restoration' as a part of conservation (see: http://www.icom-cc.org/242/about/terminology-for-conservation).

2.1 Authenticity: Static or Dynamic?

The issue of authenticity is of doubtless relevance to philosophy. We find reference to 'authenticity', 'being authentic to oneself', 'living authentically' in ethics and political philosophy throughout the entire history of thought: from ancient Greece, throughout the Enlightenment, to existentialists and contemporary social theorists. Although these views on authenticity vary, the common theme of authenticity is a constant as an ideal that affects social, moral and political thinking and does not allow for degrees. Despite the varied contexts in which the term 'authentic' is applied in philosophy, there seem to be two broad categories. Either it is used in the strong sense of being 'of undisputed origin or authorship', or in the weaker sense of being 'faithful to an original' or a 'reliable, accurate representation'. In other words, to say that something is authentic is to say that it is what it professes to be, or what it is reputed to be, in origin or authorship.

This consideration is particularly relevant to the debate on authenticity in the philosophy of art. As Dennis Dutton (2003) notes, in the philosophical literature authenticity has been mainly compared to 'falsity' or 'fakery', thus with forgeries and plagiarism. Authenticity is a much broader issue, however, than that of simply recognizing fakery in the arts. Mark Sagoff (1978a) believes authenticity to be a *necessary condition* for the correct appreciation and evaluation of a piece of art: "I wish to suggest that authenticity is a necessary condition of aesthetic value. One cannot appreciate a work of art simply for the sake of its appearance or for the feelings it induces: the identity of the object is crucial to its value; one must appreciate the work itself." (Sagoff 1978a, p. 453) Establishing the authenticity of a work of art, according to Sagoff, is to consider it unique, and this feature of uniqueness is essential to aesthetic judgment. Simply stated, the aesthetic value and significance of a work of art can only be assessed if its authenticity has been correctly determined.

But how do we determine authenticity? Of course, the first step is to study the history of the object and to identify its creator and provenance, what Dutton calls the object's *nominal authenticity* (Dutton 2003, p. 326).

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Identifying a work's 'nominal authenticity' involves making sense of it according to what he calls its original 'canon of criticism':

> What did it mean to its creator? How was it related to the cultural context of its creation? To what established genre did it belong? What could its original audience have been expected to make of it? What would they have found engaging or important about it? These questions are often framed in terms of artists' intentions, which will in part determine and constitute the identity of a work; and intentions can arise and be understood only in a social context and at a historical time. External context and artistic intention are thus intrinsically related." (Dutton 2003, p. 327).

Nominal authenticity - what is usually referred to as provenance - may be impossible to determine in many cases, but where it is possible, Dutton claims, it is a clear empirical discovery, having to do with 'cut-and-dried fact' (Dutton 2003, p. 336).

However, the matter may be more contentious than that. One issue is whether nominal authenticity is fully established in the process of the act of creation, at the work's initial point of existence. Our answer to this question determines which theory of restoration we are apt to.

(1) If our answer is affirmative we commit to the idea that authenticity is totally determined by the work's creator. An artwork's development finishes when the creative act is completed. But given that – after this initial point of existence – its identity is constantly threatened over time, as it is subjected to wear or damage, our job is to do our best to preserve its original state in the midst of potentially dangerous external influences. In my view this kind of thinking is behind a subtler philosophical concept concerning the temporality of the artwork. The technical and contextual features of an artwork are authentic insofar as they remain *constant*, that is, insofar as they can ensure its unique nature. Authenticity is thus taken to be, so to say, a universal given, exempt from historical flux; after its creation the authenticity of an artwork remains *static*.

(2) If our answer is negative we commit to the view that authenticity

is something that ties initial creation *and* temporal changes together. The social and historical context in which an artwork is created is expanded, so to say, so as to include the entire duration of the artwork's existence. As long as the artwork exists, from this point of view, its authenticity is *dynamic* and subject to an ongoing process of development. In this sense, one considers damage and change as elements that *confirm* authenticity more than threaten it. They are evidence of the work's history, and can be thought of as significant parts of its 'life', crucial components of its historicity[4].

3. A Question of Identity

Choosing between (1) and (2) is a question of metaphysics. In fact, our conception of authenticity depends directly on the ontological framework in which an art object is cataloged: should the ontological framework shift, then so too should our concept of authenticity (see: Laurenson 2006). The reasons are easily stateable. First we have something, a substance, that remains the same entity though its properties have changed, so we need a way of identifying that selfsame thing – that enduring entity which has changed; for otherwise speaking of change would be impossible. Secondly, we are confronted with an important ontological distinction between a material object and an artwork. Is the notion of 'artwork' to be disengaged from that of the physical object in which it is embodied, namely, from the characteristics of the material thing the work is (the specific properties, features and constituents of the material)? Determining this distinction is crucial if we are to understand the precise nature of an artwork's authenticity.

By considering an artwork's authenticity as ultimately defined at the point of creation, as in (1), we are reducing the notion of artwork to the *physical object* it is. Any material alteration to this object is thus considered

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[4] Modern approach and opinion on the subject would seem to promote the latter position. The Venice Charter, for example, establishes an approach to restoration that is concerned with the living history of the artwork. This living history is protected as witnessing the artwork's authenticity. However, the alternative view has not died out.

as an unwelcome and (hopefully) avoidable threat. Ontologically, this is because the *work-identity* is regarded as coextensive to the *object-identity*, and consequently all changes in the physical structure of the object as potential damage to the persistence of the work. Focus on the object implies special attention on the physical state of the work and its original material conformation. This position is consistent with what Wollheim famously called the 'physical object hypothesis':

> This theory is to the effect that in those arts where the work of art is an individual, i.e. painting, carved sculpture, and possibly architecture […] the work of art is really identical with, or is merely constitutively identical with or made of the same stuff as, some physical object (Wollheim 1980, p. 177).

Conversely, in taking the artwork's authenticity as time-resistant, as in (2), we are leaning towards regarding artworks more as *historical beings* than material objects. Though we may acknowledge the relevance of an artwork's origins, we also accept its extended, ongoing, temporality as essential to its identity. Indeed, if artworks are taken as 'individuals' distinguished in essence from the material they are composed of, they can be seen as experiencing change and alteration as part of their normal life. In considering artworks in this way, we consider history a significant part of their identity. Beginning with its creation and the elements that at that time went into establishing its authenticity (e.g., characteristic techniques of the era or the artist or the geographical sources of the materials used), the life of the artwork extends over time. As temporally situated objects, artworks are thus like *organisms*, which change as they mature. They are like 'living beings', whose identity – like that of human beings who experience mutation as part of our normal life – is distinguished in essence from the physical material they are composed of. The same plant is first just a small one, then grows to maturity, and then declines: yet, its identity is not jeopardized by these changes. Guy Rohrbaugh has famously proposed a sympathetic account, based on the recognition of three fundamental features that artworks share (modal flexibility; temporal flexibility; temporality). "To

put it crudely", Rohrbaugh states, "instead of thinking of a work of art as identical to a certain form or structure, we should think of artworks as *objects in and persisting through history*, ones which merely have a certain form" since, "all of these things come into and go out of existence, change, interact with other historical individuals, and could have been otherwise had their histories gone differently" (Rohrbaugh 2003, p. 178-9, *emphasis added*).

These two perspectives can also be understood in terms of the difference between an 'active' and a 'passive' notion of artwork (Harbin 2008). The first sees the artwork as having a kind of 'life of its own', and therefore more likely to benefit from the passage of time, to exhibit relevant novelty, to have an extended period of social influence. A passive notion of artwork sees it more like an inanimate object which is created, observed, preserved, maintained or damaged by means of external forces. Therefore, it is less likely to flourish over time, and even less to *endure* over time.

The important point, however, is that opposing interpretations of an artwork's identity impinge directly on conceptions of its authenticity; and the way in which an artwork is treated by the social and aesthetic community – including interventions of conservation and restoration – differs significantly according to how its authenticity is viewed.

If we defend (1) we opt for what I have referred to as 'Thorvaldsen's paradigm'. The authenticity of the work is seen in this view as ultimately defined at the point of creation, thus concerted effort is made to restore what is perceived to be the original and hence desirable nature of the material object. Since the artwork coincides with the object it is, the only way to preserve it is by reestablishing its original features, to bring it back to the way it was at the time of creation. This involves imagining artworks as they were at the time of completion, as if we could step into a time machine; philosophically, it draws on the idealistic idea that artworks are a-temporal entities, only contingently related to the material objects that constitute them, something outside of reality, like Platonic forms (see: Carrier 2009). Restorers take on the role of the artist, as Thorvaldsen himself did. However, while ideally trying to return a work to its original condition, they may create an historical falsification. In rebuilding parts of the *Aphaia*

Temple, Thorvaldsen merged the old and the new and created a mixture of unauthentic and authentic elements, producing an overall sensation of inauthenticity. This type of restoration can therefore diminish a work's authenticity rather than preserve it.

If we defend (2) we go along with Canova in favor of the conservation of the current *status quo* of the work. When authenticity is understood as including the whole 'life' of a work, then interventions are aimed at preserving what remains, limiting our actions to the avoidance of deterioration. We regard works as historical documents, whose value is considered to reside primarily in their age: the greater the age, the greater the value, the greater their authenticity. However, this concept is only viable in the case of archeological artifacts and ancient works of art such as the Pantheon Frieze. It can hardly apply to other works of art. Indeed, we cannot always view a work of art as if it were a document, an occurrence in history. More than simply vestiges from the past, artworks are also and primarily objects of aesthetic appreciation – and it is the aim of restoration to preserve this aesthetic characteristic[5].

Does all this mean that we must inevitably choose between admiring an artwork for its historic value and completely restoring it so that its artistic value is intact? I don't think so. No available evidence shows that one of these procedures is correct.

We can gain relevant insight from the Italian art theorist and philosopher Cesare Brandi, author of one of the most influential works on heritage conservation theory worldwide. In his *Theory of Restoration*, Brandi argues that the work of art always offers itself in a twofold way. It has an impact on the viewer both as an artistic exemplar, with unique aesthetic features and properties, and as an historical document of human history. The aesthetic value of the artwork is what Brandi calls the *istanza estetica* (this term has been translated as 'aesthetic case' (Brandi 2005), but can also be read as 'aesthetic demand'). Brandi considers aesthetic value to be the most important criterion for conservation in most cases. When the signs of time on a given piece of art compromise its aesthetic value and

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[5] This was already foreseen by Alois Riegl (1903).

appreciation they must indeed be removed in the conservation process: "if the addition disturbs, perverts, conceals or hides the artwork to some extent, it is clear that this addition must be removed" (Brandi 2005, p. 73).

However, aesthetic demands need not always prevail. The *istanza storica* (i.e., roughly, the historical value of the artwork) may take precedence: it is the conservator, or the decision-maker, who needs to make a value judgement about the prevalence of one case over another (Brandi 2005, p. 74). Balancing aesthetic and historic demands is crucial to conservation: "The relationship between both cases represents the dialectics of conservation" (Brandi 2005, p. 50), thus the two-fold identity of artworks should never be overlooked.

4. Authenticity of the Object, Authenticity of the Image

Since arguments for preserving either the aesthetic value of an object or its age are inconclusive, a productive way to continue the discussion is to reflect on the deeper notions at play.

Brandi in this regard makes another useful distinction between the material and visible structure of an artwork and what he calls '*l'immagine*', the image of the work. The artist, he states, creates a material structure with a certain visible appearance to convey her/his elected image. In the case of an altarpiece, the wood panel is the structure whose visible appearance – the picture – transmits (but does not coincide with[6]) the work's *image*. The material object is but a "vehicle for an image's epiphany" (Brandi 2005, p. 51). Unfortunately, the *Theory* offers little clarification as to the precise meaning of the term 'image': to understand it one should refer to the philosophical context in which the book was written – many of the terms used can be traced back to existentialist philosophy– and read other works by Brandi on aesthetics (see: Muñoz Viñas 2015). In a nutshell we can say that the term 'image' for Brandi epitomizes not only the figurative feature of a work of art, namely, its representational content, but also the phenomenological perception we have of it. The image is what really needs

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[6] The appearance can roughly be defined as the visible feature of the material.

to be preserved, as it constitutes the *essence* of the work.

The distinction between image and structure leaves us with the following question: is it the aim of restoration to preserve the *material* of an artwork, which changes over time, or should the restorer seek rather to preserve its *image*? Indeed, it seems that to preserve a work's image, we must preserve its *effect*, which is not the same thing as preserving the object itself.

This leads us to formulate yet a further difference between *authenticity of an object* as opposed to *authenticity of an image*. Perhaps in the end authenticity does not actually have much to do with the fact that a given physical object has been left untouched by *the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*. Indeed, authenticity may not simply lie within the physical realm.

One reason for this is that the way we perceive art objects depends on our experience of other art that the artist or her/his coevals could never know (see: Carrier 2009, p. 205). In order to view a 17th century painting unchanged, we would have to know how an educated audience of the time would have perceived it, learn much which they would have found obvious, and forget in the meanwhile what we know about later art history. Another related reason is that changes in context can change how we see a work. When an altarpiece is moved from a church to a museum and placed near modern secular art, it looks different. Its context has changed: people no longer pray before it. It has become a work of art. The material object has survived, but in a new context it now looks and is looked at in a different way. Its image has thus changed.

These arguments may lead to the following conclusion: even if an artifact is perfectly preserved, its authentic image will still be lost to us, because we bring to the work very different attitudes and expectations.

We can push this skepticism even further. Artworks are not just isolated physical objects, but things that were created to be in particular sites. Architectural works, for instance, have a special rapport with the environment in which they are set – they are "things with a habitat", so to speak. Yet, if all artworks are to be considered site-specific, at least to a certain extent, it is impossible for them to be preserved without their

surroundings being preserved as well. Hence, isolating an artwork from its original context means falsifying it[7]. But if interaction with the surrounding context has such a strong impact on a work's identity, it follows that most attempts to safeguard authenticity (by 'musealizing' an object, for example) are condemned to failure *a priori*. Maintaining authenticity may turn out to be an impossible task. In the absence of a reliable claim for preserving authenticity, however, restoration becomes a matter of personal taste, subjective, and leads to conventional options. To avoid jumping to this relativist conclusion, we need to step back and consider the question of the ontological identity of artworks.

5. Artworks, Social Objects and Continuity

There is something appealing, I must admit, about the idea of works of art being like individual living beings, as suggested in (2). Like living beings, artworks are born, grow to maturity, and (sometimes) die. Indeed, it seems that we *are* more inclined to consider artworks living beings than other ordinary objects. This explains why one of our most common attitudes toward artworks is that we are unwilling to accept replacements for them. Like humans, we believe that works of art are valuable in a distinctive way, *per se*, and thus irreplaceable. If we lose a pencil, a replacement is precisely what we want, and inconvenience aside, we feel no regret since most pencils are of equal value to us, and thus perfectly interchangeable. But imagine if we were to lose one of our friends: we would never accept the idea of a replacement, since people are unique and irreplaceable for us. *Mutatis mutandis,* something similar goes for artworks like Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, van Gogh's *De Sterrennacht* or Picasso's *Guernica.*

However, though we actually tend to think about works of art as being infused with an essential humanness or spirit[8], the analogy between

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[7]An ancient temple now a few meters from a shopping center; a church next to a busy crossroads: we are on a slippery slope here. How far can we go?

[8] Cf. with Newman, G.E., D.M. Bartels and R.K. Smith (2014). The authors of this recent empirical study argue that people's reasoning about art persistence over time is related to judgments about the persistence of individual persons, because art objects are

artworks and living organisms is not tenable metaphysically speaking. In the first place, artworks do not contain an intrinsic plan of development, do not grow and age according to a 'genetic' design, as natural organisms do. Aristotle has an effective way of stating this: the term 'nature' he claims, cannot be referred to artifacts, since 'nature' refers to the inner source of cause and change, while artifacts, apart from the nature of the matter that composes them, lack inner principles of change and rest (*Metaphysics* 192b13-23). Secondly, and more relevantly to our discussion, it is an empirical fact that while a person can continue to exist despite radical changes in her/his physical qualities, because a crucial element of identity is memory or permanence of consciousness, the same cannot be said of artworks (see: Carrier 2009). Artworks are not that sort of things.

Within the range of options conventionally considered by metaphysicians, a more promising one is to consider artworks as social entities rather than physical objects or living beings. The notion of *social object* notably comes from John Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), in which the term 'object' is used in the broadest possible sense to include all individual things, powers, and relations that depend for their very existence on human institutions and on a 'collective intentionality'. As opposed to physical objects, social entities in Searle's sense – like states, institutions, organizations – can survive change if there is sufficient continuity. Contemporary Italy is the same country it was under the rule of King Vittorio Emanuele II in 1861, though it is now a democracy and its borders have changed somewhat, whereas the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies ceased to exist when it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy and the last Bourbon king was deposed. We can say that only in the first case is there sufficient *continuity* for the object to have survived the radical changes it underwent. Assuming the analogy between artworks and social objects to be consistent, this leads yet to the question as to how we can measure continuity, and, more interestingly for the theory of restoration, how we can preserve it.

One possible answer is that gradual deterioration over time does not

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seen as physical extensions of their creators. The mere categorization of an object as 'art' versus 'a tool' changes the way people think the temporal continuity of those objects.

threaten the continuity of an artwork's existence as long as the original aesthetic arrangement of lines and colors – what Brandi would refer to as 'the potential formal unity of the work of art' – is still *readable*. In this sense, the main aim of restoration would be to (strive to) preserve continuity by facilitating the *readability* of artworks. Readability indeed rests at the foundation of restoration policies worldwide. As clearly asserted by Jean-Pierre Mohen, Director of the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France: "Readability is becoming an extremely important notion. It guarantees the authenticity of the artwork, its state of conservation and its capacity to transmit its aesthetic and cultural message." (*Le Monde des Débats*, Sept. 2000, quoted in Beck 2001, p. 1)[9]

Though a somewhat vague goal for conservators, the notion of readability interestingly invokes one of Brandi's core ideas in the *Theory*, namely, that restoration is in its essence a "critical act" of understanding and interpretation of the work that is not verbal but expressed concretely in the actions carried out. As we have learned, according to Brandi's phenomenological account, a work's image exists not only as a visible entity, but as an element of our perception: thus, the importance of restoration as a critical and interpretative act consists primarily in the impact it has on the way the image is perceived, considered and remembered. Just as literary texts are translated and retranslated, and each new version succeeds as long as it reveals something new – and refrains from placing a claim on absolute authenticity – the same goes for the conservation and restoration of works of art.

Safeguarding authenticity in conservation thus goes hand in hand with preserving a work's continuity through enhancing its structural and aesthetic legibility and meaning. Although restoration intervenes on the physical substance of an object, its ultimate goal is not to preserve the material aspect of the object but to retain or improve the meaning it has for viewers. This is why the contextual, functional and evaluative aspects of a work of art, that determine what makes it 'authentic', require careful

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[9] « La lisibilité devient donc une notion extrêmement importante. Elle est garante de la part de l'authenticité de l'œuvre, de son état de conservation et de sa capacité à transmettre son message esthétique et culturel ».

consideration.

6. Authenticity Revised

These considerations guide us to reframe our initial question on authenticity. A diagram proposed by art conservator Jonathan Kemp (2009) might be useful in this regard. Kemp's thesis is that every work of art can be hypothetically plotted at any given time between three temporal axes, where each axis describes variables stemming from an (ideal) 'ground zero' of an object's origin. The z-axis represents significant change in an object's function, the y-axis represents change in how the object is interpreted and the x-axis represents change in the original materials.
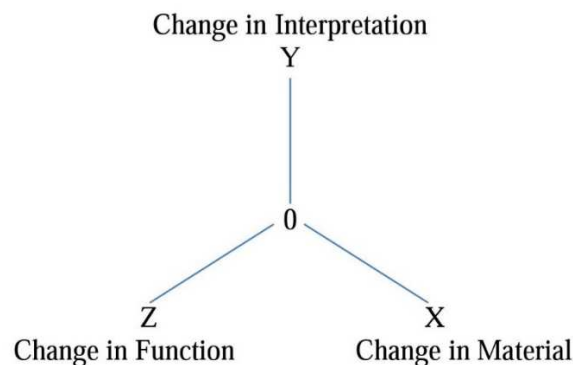
Some variables used in determining an object's authenticity

The point of this diagram is to show that sense about the authenticity of an artwork is always going to be: "a ride along a trajectory from which, at any one point, the object will have stronger or weaker genealogical links to its origins" (Kemp 2009, p. 65). Changes in multiple axes give each object a unique topology, with its boundaries closer or farther away from its 'impossible-to-return-to' ground zero. When art objects are plotted along the given axes, it becomes clear that they "don't fit into the *either/or* categories

of being authentic or non-authentic" (Kemp 2009, p. 65).

In many cases it is doubtful whether one can identify any particular component as the *locus* of authenticity in the sense of 'original object'. Kemp gives us the example of a panel of stained glass in a medieval cathedral. There is very little original glass and even less original lead, because "return to a design that is known has been a regular conservation process until at least the 1990s – yet can still be described as being authentic" (Kemp 2009, p. 64-65).

Once the notion of authenticity is 'vectorized' in Kemp's sense, it becomes more evident that the choices conservators, curators and other stake-holders make modify the coordinates of a work at any given time. Artworks indeed cannot maintain the same coordinates throughout their lifetime, and neither can objects in a museum, since their topology invariably changes whenever they are maintained and redisplayed. Even works that remain in their original context – such as the painted glass in the cathedral – will change as they deteriorate or are re-used in some way in the future.

The suggestion here is that the concept of authenticity is far more complex than it seems to be for *any* kind of artwork (say, for artworks which remains in their original site as well as for those which enter in a museum collection etc.). This is essentially because, as Kemp's diagram helps us understand, *all* autographic works have an allographic component from the point of view of conservation theory. When the same piece of art is considered from two different moments in its history, each moment can be viewed, to a certain extent, as an instance of the work plotted by a different topology in the diagram; this means that its qualities necessarily differ one from the other, yet each is to be considered 'that work of art'. Authenticity thus becomes a function of the "accuracy with which the present cultural apparatus plots an object and provides a full commentary on how its particular interpretation relates to that of its predecessors" (Kemp 2009, p. 65). This switches the focus from the condition of the material of the original artwork to documentation, the use of which – just as in the case of allographic works of art – ensures multiple authentic instances of a work (see: Goodman, 1968). The fact that conservation's methodological

efficiency must rely on documentation was one of Brandi's contentions, allowing for the possibility of the complete reversibility of any conservation intervention; and this represented a key ethical principle for him. Any material evidence of the changes made on a piece of art (removed, re-perfected or re-arranged material etc.) must be archived and should always be accompanied by written documentation, since "together they serve as a proof to the practice of art restoration and its principles" (see: Hoeniger 2009, p.101). But documentation not only provides a record of the decision-making process on the part of conservators so that future custodians can reverse the process, it also sketches the trajectory of the artwork toward one or the other vectors of the diagram, thus 'mapping' its authenticity.

Restoration can be redefined in this sense as a critical hypothesis that is, by definition, always modifiable, refuting an *either/or* polarization around the notion of authenticity/inauthenticity, material/artistic value and right/wrong interventions. If we treat authenticity as a win-or-lose affair, as some philosophers tend to do (see: Sagoff 1978a; 1978b), then we return to the diatribe between *istanza estetica* and *istanza storica*, with no clear argument for choosing one or the other. What makes restoration practices objective is not an aim to correspond to some controversial reconstruction of the original ground-zero of the work (just consider how complex the relation between function, interpretation, and material can be in different instances) but the fact that they attempt to preserve and transmit continuity, always keeping in mind the difficulty of understanding, defining and determining what constitutes authenticity in art.

7. Conclusions

These philosophical arguments may seem of marginal relevance to restorers, who must continue working while we philosophers go on talking. However, claiming that questions of restoration are merely conventional is inacceptable: the way conservation proceeds as a profession is determined by complex ideas about authenticity and identity of works of art. In fact, it is easy to understand why such philosophical debate will and should go on. It *will* go on because conservation work – when ambiguously planned – can

cause more damage than the natural process of deterioration. And it *should* go on because unless we believe these questions can find meaningful answers, conservation and restoration practices as we know them will not function.

One could argue that this is ultimately an ideological debate, the solution of which largely depends on the beliefs informing the views of the parties involved. It is my contention that though we probably have to accept the impossibility of a singular and objective theory on the care and preservation of works of art, this issue should excite rather than discourage widespread discussion. *Ars longa, philosophia perennis.*

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