



Brandi and the restoration of contemporary art. One side and the other the *Teoria*

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Abstract

The theorization of contemporary art is often presented as a recent phenomenon, and refractory to the so-called “classical” approach, inspired by Brandi. This article shows that on the contrary, since Althöfer, Brandi’s theory has underpinned many exploratory approaches, and that a careful re-reading of entire parts of his work, often neglected, is able to inform the interventions of contemporary conservation

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Reference or reverence?

Brandi has sometimes been called the “pope of restoration”. To tell the truth, it is mostly Europeans, and among them continentals of Latin tradition, who gave him this title. are far from having such reverence for him. The symposium held in his honor in New York in 2006 (Basile and Cecchini, 2011) made an effort to explain this relative disdain, again emphasized by Anglo-saxon authors (Kanter, 2007; Hughes, 2008). A similar thing happened during the symposium held in 2008 (Basile and Associazione Giovanni Secco Suardo, 2008). However, in order to better comprehend this disaffection, these analyses must be completed, and perhaps, some perspectives must also be corrected (Ashley-Smith, 2008).

In fact, Brandi, in conservation-restoration, is closer to the figure of St. Thomas Aquinas, than that of a pope. Author of a *Summa* –a work considered as definitive, he is often more quoted than read. Those who revere him have contributed to the academization of his ideas; those who disdain him have sometimes dispensed with understanding him. Complex and difficult to translate, he is most frequently reduced to aphorisms not even quoted in their original version. Some schools claim his authority, casuistry and scholasticisms contribute to obscure his thinking, and anathemas are pronounced in his name.

This fossilization of Brandi’s thinking is quite paradoxical. As Paul Philippot, who was his disciple and friend, emphasized, Brandi’s genius is revealed through the practical cases that he illuminated through his reflection, and whose undertaking show an extreme flexibility, and a grand open-mindedness (Brandi, 1995). Anathemas that were proffered on both sides

during the varnish controversy at the National Gallery undoubtedly contributed to exacerbate these stances (Glanville, 2008). But it would be unfair to reduce his position and intervention treatments to this polemic context. In reality, they were much less dogmatic on both sides than they would seem to be at first glance.

Another observation: Brandi's *Teoria* is like the seabed: it is the victim of an over-exploitation, which endangers it. This is due on one hand to its unique status and on the other hand, to the bibliographic inflation of the first decade to the 21st century.

First of all, let us take its status into consideration. Written by a renowned esthetician and art critic, *Teoria del restauro* (Brandi, 1963) was born at a pivotal moment –the middle of the 20th century.¹ Restoration was still in limbo. Struggling to constitute itself as an autonomous discipline, it still lacked recognition and legitimacy; training was still not organized within curricula. In this context, the Professor's writings, as well as his reputation and competence related to themes that had still been taken too little into consideration, would raise awareness of the importance of the act of restoration. Through him, art historians, critics and aestheticians discovered a new epistemological field. When training developed two decades later and slowly evolved to be integrated in university or higher education programs, this text, produced by a brilliant academic, would retain its benchmark status. The *Teoria* would be considered as a sort of bible, a sacred text, a text of revelation. On the other hand, its exploitation is carried out in documents and charters, such as the *Venice Charter* (1964) or the *Carta del restauro* (1972) added to its aura.

At the turn of the 21st century, however, this bible is more used as a breviary –a collection of formulas, incantations, and prayers. Reference to Brandi is an almost compulsory exercise for the restoration student, similar to the *Campanella* by Paganini or Liszt for an instrumentalist. Similarly, there is often more virtuosity than depth in its interpretation. The international symposia organized by Giuseppe Basile on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the death of Cesare Brandi lead to an swell of publications that exaggerate the importance of *Teoria*. This undoubtedly contributed to a sort of saturation, which is even perceptible among the most ardent supporters of the author.

The influence of *Teoria* on a world immersed in a globalization process must now be relativized: the extension, the diversification of the field of conservation-restoration, and the wider autonomy of the conservation traditions, linked to different objects, contexts and methodologies, contribute to place it in a more appropriate place; but has by no means been relegated. Brandi's thinking remains fundamental: it allows the construction, on solid foundations, of reflexive, critical, adaptable models, even for contemporary art. However, it is necessary to give it its original role, which is to inspire action, and not to constrain it.

Conservation and contemporary art

All the practical restoration cases, approached and treated at the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro (ICR) under the direction of Cesare Brandi, concern ancient works. The development context of *Teoria* is clearly identified: it occurred during the immediate post-war period while confronted by the ruined frescoes of Mantua and Viterbo, when Brandi and his entourage experimented an original theory and a methodology; these would later be

¹The prelude to that publication was the course *Teoria et Storia del Restauro* taught by Brandi in 1948-1949 at the faculty of Arts at the University of Rome. On the relation to Brandi's aesthetic, the elaboration of his thought since the article *Il fondamento teorico del restauro* (Brandi, 1950), and finally the text of the 1963 edition, see Petraroia (1986, 1988, 2006) and Russo (2006).

refined by their application to other cultural heritage: paintings, sculptures, archaeological objects, architecture... The common denominator of these restorable objects is their value as heritage, closely linked to art and history. Neither in Rome, nor anywhere else in the world, was the question of restoration of contemporary works of art explicitly posed –unless perhaps occasionally –and anecdotally.

This was not, however, due to a lack of interest: As an art critic, Brandi took a close interest in contemporary creation. It is worth pointing out his monographic works on *Morandi* (1942), *Picasso* (1947), the voluminous *Burri* (1963); we should also note his analytical works, such as *La fine dell'avanguardia e l'arte d'oggi* (1952) or the *Scritti sull'arte contemporanea*, in two volumes, published respectively in 1976 and 1979. In these publications, Brandi, as an aesthetician, uses descriptive terms such as alteration, decay –for example for the *Combustioni* of Burri, but never under the optic of restoration. It is definitely an art critic who is holding the pen here, and not the founder of the ICR. The former never explicitly foresees that his object of study could end up in the workshops of the latter. The same involuntary blindness can be seen in Giovanni Urbani, Brandi's student, who would also head the famous institution until 1983. His interest in contemporary art would not translate explicitly into questioning its conservation-restoration (Urbani, 2012). The first director of the ICR to integrate this new heritage in his reflection was Michele Cordaro, who would be at the front of the Institute from 1995 to 2000 (Cordaro, 1994, 2005).²

However, it was an art historian who attended the ICR and personally knew Brandi; German restorer Heinz Althöfer played a pioneering role in restoring contemporary art (both theoretically and practically). Althöfer had read psychology and philosophy before having been trained in restoration at the Doerner Institute in Munich; he then undertook several internships at the ICR, at ICCROM, at the IRPA, in Vienna, at the Louvre, and at the Capodimonte before settling in Düsseldorf and being appointed as restorer at the Kunstmuseum. Confronted with modern and contemporary art, he founded, with the support of the Henkel firm and the help of its laboratories, the Restaurierungszentrum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf.³ His expertise and ability to communicate in several languages contributed to him becoming an essential figure in conferences on the conservation of contemporary art.⁴ In the 1960s and 1970s, he published seminal works and articles (Althöfer, 1960, 1970, 1977, 1981, 1990).

Nevertheless, it wasn't until the last two decades of the 20th century that the question of conservation and restoration of contemporary art to emerge in scientific literature, with its specific problems linked to unusual forms (installations, performances), specific materials (organic, synthetic, plastic), a different relation with time, durability, and production (allographic or autographic regime, conceptual art, etc). While the innovative work *Modern Art: who cares* (proceedings of 1997) (Hummelen *et al.*, 1999) was a landmark, it should not be forgotten that Italy has, in the field of contemporary art, contributed its fair share in this field. We should therefore mention the colloquium in Torino, precursor in Europe, *Il restauro del contemporaneo*. Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, 16-17 ottobre 1987 (Mundici and Rava, 2013), the international symposium *Conservazione e restauro dell'arte contemporanea* (Righi, 1992), the *Colloquio sul restauro dell'arte moderna e contemporanea*

² We should note that Michele Cordaro, who at the time was superintendent of historic and artistic heritage in the provinces of Mantova, Brescia and Cremona –a position he held before taking the direction of the National Institute of Graphic arts (1988-1994) and of the ICR (1994-2000)– made a short presentation, very general –one and a half pages– at the colloquium of Torino, in 1987 (Cordaro, 2013: note 4). The papers, discovered by Maria Cristina Mundici and Antonio Rava, were published in 2013 (Mundici *et al.*, 2013). For the ISCR's current work on contemporary art, see the case studies presented by De Cesare (2013).

³ For the bibliographic details, see Althöfer (2011). On the role of Althöfer in the theoretical context, see notably Santabàrbara (2016).

⁴ Cf *Networks History Project*, Centre ConnecTheo, Université de Liège.

(Angelucci, 1994), and finally, the Convegno internazionale Conservazione e restauro dell'arte contemporanea of 1996 (Di Martino, 2005). We should also note that in North America, the Symposium international sur la conservation de l'art contemporain, organized for the 100th anniversary of Canada's National Gallery, in 1980 had also opened the way for pragmatic reflection, including the questionnaires of artists, the role of the restorer as an adviser to artists, the pieces of change, and of course, the problems linked to materials National Gallery of Canada and International symposium on the conservation of contemporary art (1980).⁵ Althöfer was present.

The first decade of the 21st century saw an increase in publications related to contemporary art conservation, focusing mostly on case studies and materiality. This was actually the objective of the new ICOM-CC group, Modern materials and contemporary art, created in 1998 thanks to the merging of two separate groups. *Theory and practice in the conservation of modern and contemporary art: reflections on the roots and the perspectives*, edited by Ursula Schädler-Saub and Angela Weyer, assembled the preprints of an international symposium held at Hildesheim in 2009. A chapter entitled *Theoretical principles* contains reflective and prospective articles on theory⁶ (Schädler-Saub and Weyer, 2010). *Innovative approaches to the complex care of contemporary art*, edited by Iwona Szmelter and Natalia Andrzejewska (Szmelter and Andrzejewska, 2012) dedicates an important part to theoretical reflection. Two years later, two other colloquia were organized on the conservation of contemporary art, one in Paris *L'art contemporain mis à nu par ses restaurateurs* (in press, C2RMF), the other in Glasgow *Authenticity in transition* (Hermens and Robertson, 2016). Even if case studies are a majority, some theoretical articles can be found. The same can be said for the main international meetings such as those of the IIC (*Saving the Now*, 2016) and ICOM-CC (*Linking Past and Future*, 2017).

Finally, in order to be complete, we must note the momentum created by the research project *New strategies in the conservation of contemporary art* conducted in the Netherlands between 2009 and 2015, under the direction of Renée Van de Vall; it was followed by the project *New approaches in the conservation of contemporary art*, punctuated by the symposium *Bridging the gap. Theory and practice in the conservation of contemporary art* (March 2019).

In the turmoil of the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the specificity of contemporary artworks, their apparent divergence with regards to the classical objects of restoration could have led some to believe that *Teoria*, which was anterior or barely concomitant to the efflorescence of contemporary art, had somehow "expired." But as we have shown elsewhere, a theory is first and foremost a tool (Verbeeck, 2016), and, before discarding it, one should pose the question of its adequacy to the task, of its eventual adaptability, and above all, of the capacity of the one using it.

The theoretical "tool" and contemporary art

When discussing with restorers, it is precisely the diversity, the heterogeneity of contemporary artworks that seem to discourage them from using the theoretical tool; bewildered by the problems related to the conservation of material fabric (a materiality, one must concede, that is often atypical and problematic), or by the importance of the concept and of the intangible which is coextensive to the support, they often find it hard to make a comparison

⁵ In the USA, it is possible to underline the workshop held in Richmond, Virginia, in 1990 (Frederick R. Weisman Foundation, 1991).

⁶ Notably with contributions by Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, Cornelia Weyer, Iwona Szmelter, Michaël von der Goltz, Ursula Schädler-Saub and Francesca Valentini.

or find reference points. Indeed, what are the similarities between a performance by Marina Abramovic, an artwork by Ai Wei Wei, an installation by Christo, a production by Kapoor, a work from Hockney or by Olafur Eliasson? Between a cloth in meat (*Vanitas: robe de chair pour albinos anorexique*) by Jana Sterbak and Botticelli's *Primavera*? *Away from the flock* by Damien Hirst and the *Mystic Lamb? Tree* by Paul McCarthy and *David* by Michelangelo?



STRAIGHT. Ai Weiwei, 2008, Hirshhorn Museum. Image: ©Ai Weiwei.



ALLEGORY OF SPRING.
Detail. Sandro Botticelli, 1478 to 1482.
Gallery of the Uffizi, Florence.
Image: Public domain.



ADORATION OF THE MYSTIC LAMB. Van Eyck. Imagen: Public domain.

Each of those works seems to present a new problematic, to escape the known, the defined, the "already envisaged". And yet! They all have one point in common: they are all received as works of art. They all belong to that category of special objects that the *Teoria del restauro* tries to understand, with a vocabulary and concepts that are sometimes difficult. Recognizing that difficulty as inherent to the subject is an invitation to go beyond it. Because the restorer, by restoring the fabric, becomes the one who allows the work of art to still manifest itself as a work of art, to apprehend what *is*, in the ontological sphere, a work of art is essential for him. At the very least, he must understand the ambiguous nature of the object he is dealing with, in order to better understand the implication of his intervention treatments.

Those who see in *Teoria*, or more broadly, in any theory, a methodology, are mistaking their quest. But those who try to solve the paradoxes of a work of art, and in particular its relation with time, will still find inspiration in it for sensitive and innovative intervention treatments (Brunel, 2009).

Brandi's *Teoria* and the restoration of contemporary art

The specific contribution of Brandi's *Teoria* to the restoration of contemporary art was the subject, in the 21st century, of several articles, among which the publications by Francesca Valentini (2008), Sebastiano Barassi (2009), Carlota Santabàrbara Morera (2016); the *Teoria* has been exploited again, with more or less success in various case studies (Gesché-Koning et Périer-d'Ieteren, 2008; Stefanaggi and Hocquette, 2009; De Cesare, 2013); but whether we explore the preprints of the most recent international conferences, IIC (*Saving the Now*, 2016), or of the Modern Materials and Contemporary Art working group of ICOM-CC, the reference to Brandi becomes more scarce. We should note however the colloquia explicitly dedicated to theory, such as Construir teoría, held in Mexico City in 2011 and 2013 (Magar y Schneider, 2018), or the international symposium Teorías e historia de la conservación, also in Mexico City, in 2018 which still offer it an important place,; but this remains a singular exception, and the accent is more often made on the history of the reception.⁷

What is the lesson of this relative indigence? It is not the durability of the Brandian thought, but rather the distance or sometimes even the end of a mediation on that same thought within the training programs on conservation-restoration. The hyper-specialization of practices and the increasing importance of scientific subjects leave less and less room for a theoretical reflection, which is yet at the heart of the empirical approach, in the philosophical sense of the term.⁸

Let us remember that since the conception of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro, at the end of the 1930s, Brandi had foreseen that there would be no theoretical courses (nor "cultural", nor "scientific") unless they were linked to practice.⁹ This is exactly what is described by the first generation of students of the Istituto, which directly benefitted from his lessons. The same is valid for the 1960s and 1970s. The attachment to the "original lesson" of *Teoria*, published in the meantime, does not exist; it was explained, as reported by witnesses at that time,¹⁰ in relation with practice, in the interdisciplinary turmoil of the ICR and ICCROM.

The students were therefore trained into theorization rather than into *Teoria*: this means that they were constantly requested in a dialectic movement, confronting the principle and the case. This appears clearly in the approach used by the Mora, or by Althöfer.¹¹ They, themselves, would become the inspired mediators of Brandi's thought. Their secret for the transmission to students? The tireless repetition, the reiterated explanation.¹²

If the first translations of *Teoria* are partial (cf. the Spanish version conserved in Mexico City, described by Valerie Magar), or the extracts translated into French in the special volume of *Recherches Poïétiques* (Giusto, 1995) it is because they provided elements of comprehension that were considered sufficient, with elements that were exploitable in the context of that moment.

⁷ See in particular the papers by Valerie Magar et Beatriz Mugayar Kühl (in press).

⁸ We refer here to the thoughts of Francis Bacon, John Locke and David Hume.

⁹ "De même qu'il n'y aura pas d'enseignement théorique sans exercice pratique; il n'y aura pas d'exercice pratique sans enseignement théorique" Brandi (2007: 270).

¹⁰ E.a. Anne van Grevenstein, Jukka Jokilhetto.

¹¹ Selon le témoignage de C. Périer D'Ieteren, Paul Philippot avait projeté, et commencé, la traduction d'un ouvrage d'Althöfer qu'il trouvait extrêmement intéressant pour ses cours. Il n'a pas mené ce projet à terme, vu la difficulté de traduction.

¹² Témoignage personnel d'Annie Philippot-Reniers, épouse de Paul Philippot et sa compagne à Rome pendant de longues années. C'est un témoin privilégié et impliqué dans le bouillonnement intellectuel de l'époque, et sa conversation est sur plus d'un point très éclairante.

When the context changes, diversifies, opens to other realities, the work of theorization according to the empiricist philosophy (starting from the case, to specify the principle) must be continued. But Brandi's thought does not end with the publication of *Teoria*. Refining his approach, he published other writings on aesthetics of major importance: *Le due vie* (1966) and *Teoria generale della critica* (1974). These later contributions cannot be ignored.

It is also the former of those two major works that Paul Philippot chose to translate into French, with an educational purpose (Brandi, 1989); he discerned from the outset the conceptual importance and the in-depth developments of this text, subsequent to *Teoria*. In it, Brandi reviewed the major contemporary trends, from a pragmatist such as Dewey to Barthes, Eco, Levi-Strauss, to better demonstrate the relevance of his approach, drafted since the end of the 1940s. The examples chosen in *Le due vie* are largely taken from contemporary art. They eloquently illustrate the early developments of Brandi's thought (Brandi, 1945). We also find in it the distinction between "flagranza," the immanence of the work of art, linked to time and materiality, and its "astanza," its transcendent revelation, in the conscience.

Return to the times of the work of art

Teoria, which has illuminated the conservation-restoration of classical works of art, is often reduced to axioms (including the definition of restoration as an act of recognition). What I will call the "Brandian varnish" (the minimum of knowledge on the subject) is usually summed up for conservators to a discussion of the two cases¹³ (improperly called "values"): the aesthetic case and the historic case.

Contemporary works of art can evidently respond to this dual approach, even if the historic dimension of a recent work may appear to some to be a rather vague concept. But whatever some hasty definitions may say, contemporary art is not the art of today: it already has yesterday's thickness, the time of its conception, to which is added the time of its installation, of its exhibition, of its receptions. Contemporary art is subject to patina. Contemporary art falls into ruin. Those artworks, such as the works from the past, can lose their "epiphany," to use a term that was dear to Brandi.

However, while a specific interest emerges –as well as training programs– for the *Time-based media art*, the key for Brandi's viewpoint on the times of a work is little –or not at all– exploited in the Anglo-Saxon and Dutch contexts. It is therefore symptomatic that one of the most brilliant representatives of both schools, Hannah Hölling, dedicated in 2017 an article to *Time and conservation*, but she only quoted Brandi in relation to his definition of the act of restoration (Hölling, 2017). Her dissertation, edited and published under the title *Paik's virtual archive. Time, change and materiality in media art*, does not make much more room for it –two quotations in the entire volume, referring to the same axiom borrowed from *Teoria* from its translation into English in 2005¹⁴ (Hölling, 2017).

Chapter 6 is entitled Time and conservation, and calls upon De Duve, Deleuze and Bergson to correct the vision of time held by "traditional conservation"; it is presumed to be linear, and it is centered on the quest for the original state and for authenticity. This "traditional conservation" seems to emerge straight from the 19th century (Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin are quoted), and to ignore whole swathes of the theoretical reflection and practice prior to Muñoz-Viñas (2005) or Barbara Appelbaum (2007).

¹³ Case was the word chosen to translate "istanza" by Cynthia Rockwell (Brandi, 2005).

¹⁴ The two quotations of Brandi recall his conception of restoration, as the "methodological moment of the recognition of the work of art".

In it, there are assertions such as: “The concepts of time that conservation reports have not been articulated clearly but are implicit in the rules and theories of traditional conservation” (Hölling, 2017: 96). The authority called upon to establish this surprising truth is the conservator Albert Albano, in a text from... 1988, which deals with the repainting of very specific contemporary works.¹⁵ Hölling states unequivocally that “the attempt to ‘lock a work’ can be explained in part by the Brandian separation of the time of creation from the ‘moment’ when an observer recognizes in an artwork an interval of historical time” (Hölling, 2017: 96). An incursion into the articles by Althöfer, the most Brandian contemporary art restorers, could have corrected this interpretation, and at the same time demonstrate the constant, central concern of the relation to time in restoration.

As the German restorer had seen and understood, both in *Teoria* and in *Le due vie*, Brandi very clearly distinguished the recognition of the work of art in its transcendent manifestation and its perception in the “historic” time. Even more so, in his case studies, he underlined the danger of confusing the manifestation of the transcendent work of art with the “temporal time that embraces it in its flow the complete an immutable work of art”¹⁶ (Brandi, 2001: 47) (we should understand: immutable in its revelation to conscience, as a work of art). And he continues, regarding to the contemporary work of art:

the confusion between the extra-temporal or internal time of the work of art and the historic time of the observer becomes much more serious and dangerous when it occurs –and it is almost always the case– for works from the time in which we live. For these, it seems legitimate and inevitable to have this consubstantiality with the aspirations, the objectives, the morality, the sociality of its time or a fraction of it; legitimate, but not peremptory, only if it is felt by the artist as a premise for the symbolic characterization of the object (Brandi, 2001: 47).

For Hannah Hölling, the “under-estimation of the value of time in conservation” (Hölling, 2017: 109) is therefore the subject of an invitation to rethink time inside this same conservation, as not being linear –following this under authority of Salvador Muñoz-Viñas (2005: 105). No direct or indirect reference to chapter 4 of Brandi’s *Teoria* –whose title *Time, work of art and restoration* contradicts this supposed lack of interest. There is also no reference to the *Le due vie*. The essay *L’inserzione del nuovo nel vecchio* which provides enlightening developments on the relation to time, and can also induce, even for contemporary art, reflections that are certainly less “traditional.”

I am far from the idea of considering Brandi’s thinking as an inevitable matrix. It is absolutely legitimate to leave a system that is judged as inadequate. But it is necessary, before disqualifying it, to explore its potentialities without ignoring its fundamental aspects. The concept of time is at the heart of the Brandian system, and its implications for restoration, in particular that of contemporary art, have simply not been exploited.

The fault does not lie with the instrument, but with those who use it.

¹⁵ Albano is not quoted here in its original text, but in the publication by Stanley-Price *et al.* (1996).

¹⁶ Original quotation: “temps temporel qui accueille dans son flux l’œuvre d’art achevée et immuable.”

Understanding Brandi to think further (and differently?)

The foundation for Brandi's vision of the work of art is phenomenology.

For Brandi, the artist tends to formulate, express, create something that is inside of him; he can manifest it outside of himself only through the implementation of material means. It is through this materiality that the spectator receives, perceives that "something" which is the work. The material is only its vehicle.

Art is not a language. Art is not a communication system. Art is the place of an experience out of time, of a detachment from reality, from the artist and the receiver. Art, the work of art, is that moment of out-of-the-world suspension –something that Gérard Genette will later designate as the transcendent aspect of the work (Genette, 1994).

The axiom by Brandi "only the material of a work of art is restored" flows from this conception: the material fabric is the support of an experience, and the restorer has the task of allowing the material object to continue playing its role as vector.

Except that, if art as an experience¹⁷ is "out of time," the materiality that allows this experience is well inscribed in time. More exactly, Brandi will note, the work is inscribed in the VARIOUS times:

- The time of creation, by the artist (irrevocably past, and that it is futile to try to find, it would be an imposture).
- The TIMES of the reception of the work –meaning each of the moments, since its creation, when the work has "touched" a consciousness, when it has been recognized, experimented as a work. This juxtaposition of moment generates a "duration." The restorer does not have the right, objectively, to "choose" a moment in that flow, because it would amount to freezing the materiality of the work in a moment subjectively determined (and just as past as the moment of creation).
- The time of the reception in consciousness, *hic et nunc*, here and now. In fact, the present is the only legitimate place for intervention, for the restorer, who must ensure that the work can still manifest itself to consciousness, tomorrow.

The experience of the work is transcendent (out of time, out the physical reality); the work, such as it is presented and transmitted to the future, is immanent (in time, in the real, in the physical object). It also possesses its own "interior time," that Brandi defines as rhythm. The restorer does not restore experience; he restores its support. And I would add, to concretize the reflection on the conservation and restoration of contemporary art: he restores the *means* that allow an *effect*, which causes the experience (Verbeeck, 2018).

In the text *L'inserzione del nuovo nel vecchio*, which deals with the issue of the contemporary intervention on the ancient, Brandi specifies: "with the figurative arts, we find ourselves (...) in front of a work that is also the *medium* through which we perceive it. Thus, any intervention made on this work becomes an intervention on the manner of transmitting it in time"¹⁸ (Brandi, 1995: 88). In order to understand the issue of additions, Brandi continued, it can either be approached from a philological angle, as a text, where each added element is considered an interpolation; or it can be approached from the perspective of the creator.

¹⁷ Title of a publication by Dewey, which Brandi quotes in his *Teoria* (Dewey, 1934).

¹⁸ Original quotation: "avec les arts figuratifs, nous nous trouvons (...) devant une œuvre qui est également le *medium* au travers lequel on la perçoit. Ainsi, toute intervention réalisée sur cette œuvre devient une intervention sur la manière de la transmettre dans le temps."

*On the one hand, the critic intimates the order not to alter the work, on the other, the artist claims to take it back, to increase it and to continue it (...). The first attitude considers the work of art as transmitted to us by the past, and it is through its very structure that we seek to find the different phases; the second is to reduce the work of art to the state of object to which we intend to give a new partial or total formulation. In the first case we consider the work of art historically as a unit or a historical artistic ensemble; in the second, we consider it, totally or partially, as something in evolution *in fieri*, that we can perpetuate, increase or develop [the enhancement is mine]¹⁹ (Brandi, 2007: 89).²⁰*

Certainly, the boldness of this statement that Cosgrove (1994) would not have denied, will be tempered by the modulations and restrictions posed by Brandi; if the interpolations of a text do not engender the irreversible alteration of the “original instrument” of transmission, the intervention on the work of art, on its part, modifies it in its mode of expression. Hence, Brandi continues, “any intervention that modifies or alters the historic aspect must be explained otherwise than according to a personal taste or choice”²¹ (Brandi, 2007: 90) –which obviously seems to be the case for several contemporary intervention treatments, where obsolescence, for example, constrains to choices of necessity. The example quoted by Olivier Steib, of the restoration of Jenny Holzer’s provides an excellent example (Steib, 2018).

The formulation of the work as “*in fieri*” is particularly suitable for contemporary forms, where the installations and performances become different versions offered to the aesthetic experience –and as such, all authentic. Attempts to document variations in exhibitions, according to a biographical scheme (Van de Vall *et al.*, 2011) from the point of view of conservation, only have a secondary interest in this perspective. They document the material occurrence of the work of art, its immanence. It may have an interest for history or art history, but it freezes the fact the work in a historical dimension that is sometimes completely foreign to the artist’s intention... and as it should be for the conservator-restorer.

Why? Because, let us repeat it, the role of the conservator-restorer is to allow the manifestation of the transcendence of the work, that “something,” that “experience” in consciousness that, precisely, takes the spectator out of time, precisely. His intervention on the subject does not aim to resurrect a past experience, but a present one. There can be no experience of the work of art, except *in the present*.

The conservator-restorer is not an entomologist, pinning a dead butterfly –the past experience of a past work of art: he is the one who watches over the preservation of the cocoon, of the chrysalis of the aesthetic experience.

¹⁹ Brandi defends keeping additions that are older than 150 years. It was only in the 19th century that monuments (in the broad sense, and therefore including works of art) are considered as “historically closed shapes”. Once the artwork enters in that new (historic) paradigm, it is no longer possible to admit the intervention on the work -as it was done for example during the Renaissance or the Baroque-, in a perspective of integration to the contemporary aesthetics, producing a new unity (Brandi, 2007). But does the contemporary artwork pertain to the historic conscience? This still has to be discussed. Numerous living contemporary artists raise against that conception.

²⁰ Original quotation: “D’un côté, le critique intime l’ordre de ne pas altérer l’œuvre, de l’autre, l’artiste prétend la reprendre, l’augmenter et la continuer (...). La première attitude considère l’œuvre d’art telle que nous l’a transmise le temps passé, et c’est à travers sa structure même que nous cherchons à en retrouver les différentes phases; la seconde consiste à ramener l’œuvre d’art à l’état d’objet auquel nous entendons donner une nouvelle formulation partielle ou totale. Dans le premier cas nous considérons l’œuvre d’art historiquement comme une unité ou un ensemble artistique historique; dans le deuxième, nous la considérons, totalement ou en partie, comme une chose en évolution *in fieri*, que nous pouvons perpétuer, augmenter ou développer (C’est nous qui soulignons).”

²¹ Original quotation: “toute intervention qui modifie ou altère l’aspect historique doit pouvoir s’expliquer autrement qu’en fonction d’un goût ou d’un choix personnel.”

Brandi is dead, long live Brandi

I started teaching Brandi to conservation students almost 25 years ago; it was initially with circumspection –and with no particular sympathy. One of my first articles on Brandi had a truncated publication: the expression of certain reluctances had been perceived as a crime of *lèse-majesté*. One of the finest scholars on Brandi, Georges Brunel, invited me to delve deeper into Brandi's thinking (Brunel, 2009), just like, shortly after, Paul Philippot (2010) encouraged me to read Brandi beyond *Teoria*.

This dive into the depths was a demanding task –and, at times, discouraging. Nevertheless, I never it was never without reward. Brandi is not “my” sole reference. He is one of those who taught me to theorize, in other words, to consider problems from a certain degree of generality, in order to escape the tyranny of the case by case. Familiarity with his publications leads to a better understanding of Genette and Eco, the thinkers that I consider to be the most promising regarding the current reflection on conservation-restoration.

The late publication of the complete translations of *Teoria* may have had an unexpected effect on Brandi's teaching: to focus a lesson on a text, at the cost of spirit. The advances in phenomenological aesthetic, the emergence of other names and booming trends are now more appealing to young doctoral students who, due to the lack of inspired mediators, are no longer confronted by Brandi's thinking: hence the shortcuts, misinterpretations, and a criticism that is not always relevant to the assessment of his contribution.

What lesson can we draw from this observation? We must return to the fundamentals: that is to say, to a confrontation of theory with practice, at the heart of the workshops where tomorrow's restorers are being trained. The theory is not an exercise in style, an imposed passage, the place to show some sort of boldness or virtuosity of the mind. The theory is at the service of restoration as a critical act: it is the standard of the free and enlightened judgment of the conservator-restorer. And it is for this reason that the students must learn, through their training, to forge their tools. In other words, students must sharpen their capacity to reflect, as one sharpens a scalpel, and to polish the theory, so that it better reflects reality.

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