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BUT IS THIS *REALLY* AUTHENTIC? REVISING AUTHENTICITY IN RESTORATION PHILOSOPHY

1. Introduction

In 1816 Antonio Canova famously refused to restore the fragmentary Parthenon 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, he declared that however badly these statues had suffered from time 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 “testified the perfection to which art had advanced under Phidias among the ancients”¹; 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. Thorvaldsen did his job very thoroughly; to be sure, when one looks at the final result, the differences between the Neoclassical style, belonging to the restorer’s era, and the original style of the sculptures are no immediately apparent, but the dis-

¹ Quoted in: Griffiths (1811, 277).

tance between creation and reconstitution is tangible nevertheless. 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 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 conflicting perspectives recall a famous distinction introduced in the philosophical debate by Mark Sagoff (1978) between what he christened *integral* and *purist* approaches to art restoration. Roughly, the integral approach aims to restore an artwork to its state at the time of its completion, even if doing so might involve adding or substituting newly fabricated components. On the other hand, the *purist* approach rejects the idea that the object should be repristinated to its original conditions and allows only for cleaning of the original work and reattachment of components that might have fallen off.

In this paper, I argue that each of these approaches is based (and I refer to Ami Harbin 2008, on this) on a peculiar understanding of authenticity as either a 'static' or a 'dynamic' notion and invokes a different answer to the familiar philosophical dispute on what an artwork is ontologically. However, 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-configured in conceptual terms.

2. Authenticity in conservation/restoration

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 state². Restoration 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 (2009) 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 profession³.

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 want to focus here on one particular philosophical issue *par excellence*. My question is simple yet the answer isn't: How are we to understand authenticity from the point of view of preservation theory? Any attempt to answer this question requires consideration of the scope and purpose of restoration/conservation as well as a practical understanding of the significance of 'authenticity'; what it means to restorers, artists, and society as a whole.

2.1 Authenticity: Static or Dynamic?

Authenticity is a central philosophical notion. 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, a common theme is that authenticity is an ideal that does not admit of degrees: either something is authentic or it is not. This explains why many of the discussions on authenticity in the philosophy of art have been centered on an *either/or* polarization around the notions of authentic/inauthentic, original/fake, genuine/deceptive, true/false, real/counterfeit. Within the world of traditional fine art objects to say that some-

² 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>).

³ Cf. with: Richmond & Bracker (2009, 15).

thing is authentic is to say that it is what it professes to be, or what it is reputed to be, in origin or authorship, with no room for uncertainty. Authentic objects hold within them material evidence that causally relates them back to the hand of the author. In this sense, they provide us with a direct link to a particular past. Many have therefore argued that authenticity is prerequisite for our aesthetic appreciation to come about in the first place⁴. An incorrect presumption or discovery of mistake reduces the aesthetic impact of the object or even jeopardises the experience altogether.

The relevance of judgment of authenticity for aesthetic experience is explored for example by Mark Sagoff (1978) who believes authenticity to be a *necessary condition* for the correct apprehension 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 1978, 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 appreciation, since 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, 327). 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?» (Dutton 2003, 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 plain empirical discovery, having to do with 'cut-and-dried fact' (Dutton 2003, 336). A conservator might be able to draw upon precise scientific analysis to establish that a particular object is authentic. Procedures used to authenticate objects can concentrate for instance on the identifica-

⁴ See Sagoff (1978; 2014); Levinson (1987); Taylor (1989); Farrelly-Jackson (1997); Korsmeyer (2008); on this.

tion of materials, the examination of tool marks and other features of construction, and the use of dating techniques. Nominal authenticity can in this sense be determined as a matter of scientific precision. The issue, however, may be more philosophically contentious than that.

One central problem is for instance whether nominal authenticity is fully established in the process of the act of creation, namely, at the work's initial point of existence. Our response to this question greatly influence 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. This underlies a peculiar conception 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, damage and change are 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 historicity⁵.

⁵ 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.

3. A question of metaphysics

Choosing between (1) and (2) is a question of metaphysics, since our conception of authenticity depends directly on the ontological framework in which an art object is classified: should the ontological framework shift, then so too should our concept of authenticity (Laurenson 2006). As a matter of fact, 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 which has changed, for otherwise speaking of change would be impossible. Determining this ontological issue 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, we are reducing the notion of artwork to the physical object it is, namely, to the 'configured-and-conditioned' object (Levinson 1989, 279) it is composed of, whose parts have been structured in a certain unique way by the original artist. The *work-identity* is regarded as coextensive to the *object-identity*, and consequently all changes in the physical structure of the object are considered potential damage to the persistence of the work⁶. Gradual alteration over time to this is thus seen as an unwelcome and hopefully avoidable threat.

Conversely, in taking the artwork's authenticity as time-resistant, we are leaning towards regarding an artwork as a *historical being*. Though we may acknowledge the relevance of the work's origins, we also accept its extended, ongoing, temporality as essential to its identity. Taken as a 'living individual', an artwork can be seen as experiencing change and alteration as part of its normal life. The same plant is first just a small one, then grows to maturity, and then declines: yet, its identity is not jeopardized by these changes⁷. Beginning with its creation and the elements

⁶ This position can be thought of as 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, 177).

⁷ 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, 178-9 *emphasis added*).

that went into establishing its nominal authenticity (e.g., techniques of the era, the artist or the geographical sources of the materials used), the life of the artwork extends over time. It is in this sense like an *organism* which changes as it matures and whose identity is distinguished in essence from the physical material it is made of.

Notice 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 aesthetic 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, bringing 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 (Carrier 2009). Restorers who endorse this 'integral' approach are prone to take on the role of the artist. However, while trying to return a work to its original condition, they may create an actual historical falsification. For example, in rebuilding parts of the *Aphaia Temple*, Thorvaldsen merged the old and the new and ended up producing an overall sensation of falsity. 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, artworks are regarded as historical documents whose value resides primarily in the age: the greater the age, the greater the value, the greater the authenticity. Interventions are therefore aimed at preserving what remains, limiting actions to the avoidance of deterioration. However, this 'purist' approach seems only viable in the case of archeological artifacts and ancient works of art such as the Parthenon 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 characteristic⁸.

4. Problems with the two paradigms

Are we really forced to choose between either completely restoring an artwork to enhance its aesthetic value (whereby compromising its documental character) or maintaining it in its status quo to preserve its historic value (thus threatening its aesthetic worth)? Neither of these options seems intuitively convincing.

One way to make sense to this intuition is to reconsider the two approaches in the light of the distinction, formerly introduced by Cesare Brandi (2005), between what he calls the *istanza estetica* ('aesthetic case' or 'aesthetic demand') and the *istanza storica* (i.e., roughly, the historical value of the artwork).

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 a historical document of human history. He 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 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, 73). *However*, aesthetic demands need not always prevail. The historical value may often 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, 74).

This explains why, according to Brandi, arguments for preserving either the aesthetic value of an object – as in Thorvaldsen's integral restoration model – or its age – as in Canova's purist approach – are ultimately inconclusive. No available evidence shows that any of these procedures is correct. In fact, that between historic value and aesthetic value is a false alternative. Trying to find a balance between the two demands is instead the crucial aim of preservation science: «The relationship between both

⁸ This was famously foreseen by Alois Riegl (1903).

cases represents the dialectics of conservation» (Brandi 2005, 50), and the 'two-fold nature of artworks' must never be overlooked.

But problems also arise when examining the paradigms from an ontological perspective. Although it may be appealing to consider works of art like simple physical objects or individual living beings, the analogy is in both cases not tenable metaphysically speaking. In the first place, while physical objects survive the gradual replacement of their original parts, artworks do not. A computer is the same object though its original components may be gradually replaced as they deteriorate; an artwork, on the other hand, does not survive replacement of its original parts. If a painting is constantly repainted so that in the end nothing of the original varnish is left, the artwork has not survived, although the original picture might in fact have.

In the second place, though there is certainly something appealing about the idea of works of art being like individual living beings⁹, artworks do not contain an intrinsic plan of development, do not age according to a 'genetic' design, as natural organisms do. In other words, they do not share a common *physis* which brings with it a «settled single-track pattern of coming to be, maturation and passing away» (Wiggins 2012, 10). 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).

4.1 Artworks as social objects

Within the range of options conventionally considered by metaphysicians, a more promising one may be to consider artworks as social entities rather than physical objects or living beings. The notion of *social object* notably comes from John Searle (1995), who uses the term in the broadest possible sense to include all individual things, powers, and relations that depend for their very existence on human conventions, practices, institutions; basically, on collective intentionality. Artworks are social objects

⁹ We actually tend to think about works of art as being infused with an essential humanness or spirit. 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 seen as physical extensions of their creators.

in the sense that that they are what they are because of a network of conventions that determine the parameters we use to identify them (Binkley 1977, 259). Even so (apparently) simple a question as what a painting is cannot be answered without reference to the conventions of depiction which have been adopted by a particular society in a particular time. In this network of conventions, each art form establishes criteria for identifying single artworks and appropriately experiencing their aesthetic qualities.

More relevantly to the theory of restoration, as opposed to physical objects, social entities – 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. Let us grant, for the sake of the argument, the analogy between artworks and social objects: this leads us yet to the question as to how we can measure artworks' continuity, and, especially, how we can *preserve* it.

5. Readability and the authenticity of the image

One possible answer is that gradual deterioration does not threaten the continuity of an artwork's existence as long as its original aesthetic arrangement is still *readable*. In this sense, the main aim of restoration would be to (strive to) preserve continuity by facilitating the 'readability' of artworks. Indeed, according to the director of the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France, Jean-Pierre Mohen: «Readability is 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*».¹⁰ Artworks' authenticity could accordingly be understood in terms of continuity of 'readability'. However, readability, as a criterion for restoration, seems particularly vague. How are we to understand it?

¹⁰ From *Le Monde des Débats*, Sept. 2000, quoted in Beck (2001, 1): «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».

Again, we can gain some insight from reading Brandi's *Theory of Restoration*. The artist, Brandi states, creates a certain material structure with a certain visible appearance to convey what he calls *immagine*, the image of the work. In the case of an altarpiece, the wood panel is the structure whose visible appearance – the picture – transmits (but does not coincide with¹¹) the work's image. The material object is but a «vehicle for an image's epiphany» (Brandi 2005, 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 essay was written – many of the notions used can be traced back to existentialist philosophy – and read other works by Brandi on aesthetics¹². In a nutshell, though, we can say that the term 'image' 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 to be maintained, as it constitutes the essence of the work, namely, the result of the synthetic act taking place in the artist's mind during the creative process and then externalized into a material structure. The work's image, thus, exists not only as a visible entity, but as an element of our perception and understanding. In light of this, we can argue that preserving continuity in restoration may consist primarily in safeguarding the impact the work has on our consciousness; that is, in keeping its image perceivable, understandable and appreciable – in a word, *readable*.

This leads us to re-consider the intuitive assumption that the aim of restoration is to preserve the original material of an artwork. Indeed, it seems that to preserve a work's authenticity, we must preserve its image readability, which is not the same thing as preserving the physical object itself. We can thus formulate a further difference between the authenticity of the object as opposed to the authenticity of the 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.

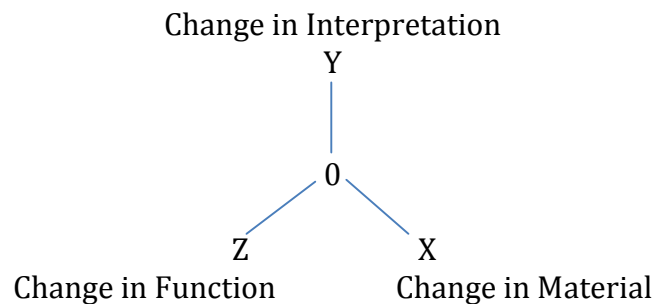
¹¹The appearance can roughly be defined as the visible feature of the material.

¹² For an introduction to Brandi's aesthetics and philosophy of restoration see (in Italian): Catalano (1998); Carboni (2004); D'Angelo (2006); (in English): Rockwell (2005); Matero (2007).

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, 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. Its function has changed too: it has become a work of art. The material object may have survived, but in the new site it now looks and is looked at in a different way. Its image has thus been altered. But if changes in evaluation, context, and function have such a strong impact on a work's identity, it follows that most attempts to safeguard authenticity solely by safeguarding the original physical object (for example by musealizing the art piece) are condemned to failure *a priori*.

6. Authenticity revised

These considerations urge us to broaden our notion of authenticity beyond the mere 'material structure' of the physical object, so as to include contextual, functional and evaluative aspects among the relevant factors that contribute to make a work's authentic. 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.



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, 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 dichotomic categories of being authentic or non-authentic.

In many cases it is even doubtful whether one can identify any particular component as the *locus* of authenticity in the sense of 'original physical 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, 64-65).

Once the notion of authenticity is 'vectorized' in this sense, it becomes more evident that the choices conservators, curators and other stake-holders make always modify the coordinates of a work. Artworks indeed cannot maintain the same coordinates throughout their lifetime, 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 stay in their original location as well as for those which enter in a museum collection etc.). This is essentially be-

cause, as Kemp's diagram helps us understand, *all* autographic works have an allographic component from the point of view of preservation 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.

Hence, we had better look at the philosophy of music to explore alternative ways of understanding authenticity that might be helpful to restoration. In this model authenticity admits of degrees (i.e. a performance can be more or less authentic) and is measured against the designation of work-defining properties, properties, that is, that are important to the identity of the work (which leaves room for interpretation). This also helps us switch the focus of restoration to documentation, the use of which – just as in the case of allographic works of art – ensures multiple authentic instances of a work. Documentation, whether it be written reports, database entries, images, photographs or material evidences, represents indeed an attempt to capture the work-defining properties. The fact that restoration's methodological efficiency must rely on documentation is also particularly relevant because it allows for the complete reversibility of any intervention – a key principle in today's preservation ethics. 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 this serves «as a proof to the practice of art restoration and its principles» (Hoeniger 2009, 101). But documentation does not only provide 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.

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, 65) and can be redefined in this sense as a complex notion that refutes by essence *either/or* polarizations around the notions of true/false, genuine/deceptive, original/fake. If we treat authenticity as a black-or-white affair, then we are again pushed back to the diatribe between integral-

ists and purists, Thorvaldsen and Canova, aesthetic and historic value, with no clear argument for choosing one or the other.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, I have shown how affected the debate about restoration is by shifts in our implicit conceptions of the artwork identity and authenticity. In fact, it is also affected by major changes in our concept of culture: when prominence is given to the process rather than to the product; when symbolic values are preferred to material values; when aesthetic interests prevail on historical ones. This is part of the reason why examining the principles of preservation theory is such a tough task, involving parallel discussion of various ideals and values and concomitant consideration of the most physical *and* the most intangible properties of a work of art. Restorers need to find a happy medium between preserving each and every material feature of the object and modify it to satisfy different aesthetic needs. Sometimes this sweet spot may be easy to find, but most of the times it is much more difficult to determine, when, for instance, the object possesses different meanings for different people. Unluckily, there is no universal rule that can make things simpler.

Philosophical arguments in this regard may seem of marginal relevance to distressed restorers, who must continue working while we philosophers go on talking. Nevertheless, claiming that questions of art preservation are merely conventional is unacceptable: the way restoration proceeds as a profession is determined by complex ideas about the ontology and philosophy of art. In fact, it is easy to understand why such philosophical debate will and should go on. It *will* go on because restoration 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 quarrel, 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.*