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Notes Toward a Virtual Restoration

Martino Oberto

In the event that restoration is necessary, a conceptual analytic base leads to an awareness between *syn* and *thesis*: an awareness that sets up for discussion the criteria which each epoch has expressed with the profound conviction that it aimed for the "best."

To wit: with the first great wave of restorations in the XVII century, the *refacebat*—that's how the Restorer used to sign—of the painter who in deference to the original composition and design limited himself to repainting by "freshening up" with oil paints the ancient tempera and subsequently would pin the cartouche proudly displaying his signature.

With the second wave of restorations in the XIX century, the century of the first industrial revolution, the Restorer deploys Solvay soda to clean the color thoroughly until it whitewashes right before his eyes, convinced that he would thus give new life to the ancient leaden color. In this instance, pictorial restoration is executed minutely in the cracks opened up by the alkaloid, in a complete remaking and "improvement" of the work. Everything was then dressed with colored varnishes, as in the case, for example, of the *beverone*, which gave the painting brilliance and a golden finish.

Hypotheses, criteria, knowhow face to face: the "technological condition," says Beck, can in the long run result in greater risk.

Where does the risk reside? It can reside in the consequences of the unforeseen, of the irreversible: what is not reversible must be left alone. But how can we distinguish, what operative criteria will we employ? The simplest criteria is based on a graduate scale from one to ten as from white to black by going through all the greys or from the infrared to the ultraviolet by going through the rainbow,

transcribing the false colors after a beneficial spray of varnish. It would be a good idea to stop at three: the entire differentia is virtual.

The true and the false the false and the true of art—to know how to determine this is also part of the criteria by which art liberates: art is perhaps the true horizon of liberty: choosing a s'object, becoming a work of art.

Restoration by intention, a color intention, like a cachet, a nothing, the intention of nothing on this side of risk, beholding the beautiful.

The crafted work is what follows artful paraphrasing. Doyle. The great innovation of painting with oils. Giusto di Gand illustrates Great Men. To paint with oils upon the wall is what makes Leonardo abandon the challenge and lose the image. The great decoration unveiled in the Sistine Chapel proves Michelangelo right, he admits to being a non-painter: let the leaden Judgment remain to bear witness to the most dramatic page in Italian Art.

Lead, smoke, darkness protect the work from the light, the circulation of warm air from low to high and at times also the contrary movement that takes place every day carries extremely small atomic and corpuscular particles that stick uninterruptedly and become magnetized on the painted surface, night and day and day and night, the wall, the iron in the wall, attracts the magnetized particles, the dust and electrostatically pins the negative or positive charge and changes the hue of the color, the color itself changes, as it is changed also by the light, by the darkness, by the varnish that fixes it the varnish that yellows the varnish that dares the eye is attracted and looks on.