

## CONSERVATION OF CONTEMPORARY ART: A CHALLENGE FOR THE THEORY OF CRITIC RESTORATION?

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*Abstract:* The Theory of Restoration (1963) by the Italian theoretician and restorer Cesare Brandi set out some methodological procedures and performing principles that have been a keystone in the restoration praxis since the 1964 Restoration Charter. Differences to the Anglo-Saxon world aside, these procedures are current for what we consider “traditional” art, although its use in contemporary works of art is not so obvious, which has given place to theoretical debates on the restoration of contemporary works of art in different museums and institutions. These restorations have posed a question without consensus, and an evident confrontation between the Italian and the German theories.

*Key words:* Restoration. Contemporary Art. Althöfer. Schinzel. Brandi.

At first sight, it is stunning the restoration of contemporary art since its historical proximity should avoid it. However, we are in front of works that have been highly damaged and deteriorated in the last years, due in most cases to experimentation in the creative processes, the using of industrial materials whose aging was unknown and, above all, to the artists’ disdain for the material development of their works.

Artists today give more importance to other artistic values, not so much to physical aspects but to abstract concepts such as the content, message, the experimental creative process or the form itself, the design.

In addition to all this, there are works which defy the classical rules of art. If an artist includes deterioration as a constituent part of the work of art, are we right to contradict his intention? For instance, the artists who work with food as a means of expression and consider its self-degradation as an intrinsic part of the work of

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art's lifetime. This is the case of Dieter Roth<sup>1</sup>, a German artist who used chocolate as expressive material, Joseph Beuys<sup>2</sup>, who used hoax fat in his works, or Wim Delvoye, who worked with tattooed chickens<sup>3</sup>.

Today's restoration criteria, consolidated decades away by means of congresses, charters and publications, hold as an absolute principle the respect for the material and time's footprint on it, a principle accepted in old-art restoration but, meaningfully, of no application in contemporary art. This is due to the loss of value the artist gives to the material and the importance given to the message, the intention or idea, and it is there where a basic question lies: where is the authenticity of contemporary art? and, therefore, what must be preserved: the material, the artist's intention whether aesthetic of conceptual, or simply the project?

### CESARE BRANDI'S THEORY OF RESTORATION

In front of contemporary artists' attitude, today's theory of restoration is based, largely, on the ideas of Cesare Brandi (1906 Siena, 1988 Vignano). Art historian and restorer himself, he wrote *Theory of Restoration* (1963) where he summed up the basic ideas of his thought. For Brandi, restoration is defined as: "the methodological moment in which the work of art is appreciated in its material form and in its historic and aesthetic duality, with a view to transmitting it to the future"<sup>4</sup>.

From this definition it is understood that only the material the work of art is restored and this is prior in the restoration processes since it unites the historical and aesthetic instances. In the same way, Brandi holds that "the fact that the material may be the same is not enough to allow us to complete an unfinished or damaged building, because the historicity the material would acquire by means of the new use must not be taken backwards in time so as to avoid a historical as well as an aesthetic forgery from being created"<sup>5</sup>. Today's theory of restoration is based on these ideas when stating that reintegration should be made with different materials to the original ones otherwise this new material apparently old should detract the historical value of the work of art.

In this way what Brandi does is to unify the two instances confronted throughout history, such as those defending the work of art as a historical document (Luca Beltrani) and those who consider it a merely aesthetic element (Viollet-le-Duc). Brandi defines every work as something unique and specific, naming it *Unicum*.

1 "Schokoladenmeer". *Chocolate sea*. Dieter Roth. (1970). Macha Collection. Barcelona.

2 For instance his work: *Fettecke in Kartonschachtel, Grease corner in paperwork box*. By Joseph Beuys. (1963). Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

3 *Chickens*. Wim Delvoye. (1996).

4 BRANDI, C., "La restauration". in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, XI, Venecia-Roma, 1963, pp. 322-332.

5 BRANDI, C., "La restauration"... in *op. cit.*, pp. 322-332.

Depending on his definition of restoration he establishes two principles which will be the backbone of the theory of restoration up to date: first of all, only the material form of the work of art is restored; and, the second one, restoration must aim to reestablish the “potential unity of the work of art, as long as this is possible without producing an artistic or historical forgery and without erasing every trace of the passage of time left on the work of art”<sup>6</sup>.

Out of these two principles, Brandi takes the three criteria used systematically in the field of scientific restoration:

- 1) The maximum respect to the original; the material form is unchangeable since it constitutes the aesthetic and artistic value of the work.
- 2) The recognition of the interventions without producing a historical forgery, that is, reintegration must be discernible and easily identifiable. As Brandi says: “additions should be invisible at the distance the work of art is observed, but immediately discernible, without any support, in a closer observation”<sup>7</sup>. In order to reinforce his theory he uses the concept of lacuna as an interruption of the figurative field, a void that has to be filled by means of chromatic abstraction (*tratteggio*), in such a way that it disappears and is neutralized at sight.
- 3) And, last, the repetition of the intervention, erroneously translated as reversibility in many cases, what means to allow future restorers new interventions without being excessively conditioned by previous ones (which has turned out in a post-Brandian direction towards minimum intervention)<sup>8</sup>, because intervention should never be definite. In Brandi’s words: “every restoring intervention should not make impossible, but facilitate future interventions”<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding the temporality of the work of, Brandi distinguishes three times: the first one is the creation of the work of art; the second one elapses up to the recognition of the work as a work of art, the third one occurs in the very moment of its reception into our conscience: “Restoration, in order to be a legitimate operation, could not presume that time is reversible or that history can be abolished. (...) This historical requirement should translate not only into a differentiation of the integrated areas, but also into the respect for the patina, and for saving sample areas that show the state of the work of art before the restoration”<sup>10</sup>.

6 BRANDI, C., “La restaurazione”..., in *op. cit.*, pp. 322-332.

7 BRANDI, C., “La restaurazione”..., in *op. cit.*, pp. 322-332.

8 BONSAITI, G., “Proposals for a Theory of the Restoration of Contemporary Art” in Mundici & Rava (ed.), *What's Changing*. SKIRA editore. 2013. Milano. p.125.

9 BRANDI, C., “La restaurazione”..., in *op. cit.*, pp. 322-332.

10 BRANDI, C., “La restaurazione”..., in *op. cit.*, pp. 322-332.

Once the basic principles of restoration according to Brandi have been mentioned, it only rests to talk about the nature of the work of art in which, as Brandi states, the material is of great relevance: “The physical consistency of the work of art must be prior since it represents the very place where the image manifests itself, ensures the transmission of the image to the future, and guarantees its perception in the human conscience”<sup>11</sup>.

#### THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CESARE BRANDI’S THEORY AND THE PRACTICE OF RESTORATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART

The attention to the material of the work of art is, no doubt, one of the most important differences between the practice of contemporary art restoration and Brandi’s principles of restoration. First of all, in contemporary art the idea of the work makes up for the hand of the artist, the work loses its value as a material object on behalf of the concept. In fact, in some cases, the works are made without any manipulation by the artist. This is the case of Richard Serra, who designs and draws the works but they are made in a dockyard, as an industrialized process, supervising the process but without any active participation.

“Contemporary art expresses itself through a new language, reflects some aspects peculiar to our age based on the ephemeral, the provisional and changeable”<sup>12</sup>.

Our perception of old art and the temporal distance makes it easier to tolerate a degraded and fragmentary aesthetic aspect, since its being a consequence of an undeniable passing of time which has left a footprint on the works of art. But in contemporary art there is not such a temporal perspective and any alteration may be “made up” to deny the passing of time and cling to its contemporary image, which lies on its aspect of already-finished work. In fact, restorations of contemporary works have been made in which the aesthetic instance has prevailed over the historic one, contradicting the Brandian theories and setting out a new methodology in favor of a perfect appearance, without any trace of the passing of time, as a reflection of a material history. This is the case of the painting by Barnett Newman *Who is Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III* (1967-1968). In 1989 it was the subject of a vandalistic attack. Since Newman had passed away his widow was prompted and the restoration was assigned to Daniel Goldreyer. Once the work was restored in 1991, its immaculate aspect seemed rather suspicious and, as it was intuited, was completely repainted with alkyd paint, altering in an irreversible way the material composition of the work and its look<sup>13</sup>.

11 BRANDI, C., *Teoria del restauro*, Roma, Edizioni di storia e Letteratura, 1963.

12 RAVA, A., “Form and Memory; the conservation of Contemporary Art”. in Mundici & Rava (ed.), *What’s Changing*. SKIRA editore. 2013. Milano. p.125.

13 ROETAECHE, M., *Conservación y restauración de materiales contemporáneos y nuevas tecnologías*. Editorial Síntesis, Madrid. 2001, p. 150-151.

However worrisome the repaints and aesthetic renovations in monochrome painting may be, it is even more worrying in the sculpture made in an industrial way, which is not carried out by the artist's hands, according to his design or project, its material renovation being unquestioned since what acquires much more importance is its look. In this sense the sculpture by Jorge Oteiza *Mirador mirando* (1958), placed in the entrance square to the Vitoria's Artium, remade in Corten steel in 2003, a different kind of steel to that used originally. The change of material was based on its bad conditions of preservation and because Corten steel could not be used in Spain in 1958 since the trademark was not allowed in Spain. So, claiming conservative and aesthetic reasons and the author's intention of using Corten steel, this drastic renovation was carried out, perhaps not so much a restoration as the reconstruction of a work based on an ideal project.

In the same line we find the work *Carmen* by Alexander Calder (1974), located in the Sabatini Patio in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía<sup>14</sup>. Its restoration was considered due to the obvious decay of the covering paint. The Calder Foundation, once consulted, guided the restoration process, by means of a drastic intervention on the work, when compared to the traditional restoration procedures. Surveys were made, eliminating original paint layers, and those laid by time, including the artist's proofs. The surface was completely polished in order to apply a new layer on an industrial basis<sup>15</sup>. This process of repainting was made according to the Calder Foundation's instructions, with paint of the Keeler & Long Company, which was composed as that of the artist's and, in this way, no different material to the original was added<sup>16</sup>.

This restoration poses an important question: if the patina, defended as an unquestionable value in traditional artistic heritage, loses its value in contemporary art because of the scarce temporal distance, to what extent should we restore our contemporary artistic heritage: for years, decades or centuries? What is definitely posed is the debate on the historicity of contemporary art, when may an artwork be defined as historic and not contemporary, and at what time must it be respected as a bearer of historic and not only aesthetic values.

There is another kind of contemporary artworks, the kinetic ones, whose reason for existence lies on movement, therefore its recovery comes first, prevailing over the substitution of its original constituent parts. This is the case of *Gismo*, by Jean Tinguely (1960), in the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum collection restored in

14 SANTABÁRBARA, C., *Conservación de Arte Contemporáneo. Historia y crítica*. Diploma de Estudios Avanzados. Department of Art History. University of Zaragoza. Unpublished. Zaragoza. 2009.

15 SÁNCHEZ, J.A., "Carmen". Alexander Calder, in *Conservación de Arte Contemporáneo 10ª Jornadas*. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. GE-IIC. Madrid. 2009.

16 ROETAECHE, M., *Conservación y restauración de materiales contemporáneos y nuevas tecnologías*. Editorial Síntesis. Madrid. 2001.p. 266.

the 1990s<sup>17</sup>. This work had lost its reason for existence as a kinetic work since the elements compounding the moving mechanism were deteriorated. Many pieces had to be replaced, above all the rubber straps, completely broken and deteriorated, and many other elements of the structure. This intervention meant the substitution of the broken original material for a new kind of elements which help the work to move and produce the sound for which it was conceived. In this case, the essence of the work lay in the movement, not in its material and historic values, being the recovery of the moving system the most important question.

Another concern in contemporary art preservation is the early decay of the plastic elements. For instance, *Linear Construction no. 2* by Naum Gabo (1949), in the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, is made up of nylon threads that became yellowish and broke, which force restorers to substitute them for new ones, since they are industrial material. But, in this case, as in many others, we should ask ourselves if the complete material renovation of the work would affect its originality, and if we might appreciate a work by Naum Gabo as a work from the late 40s or, on the contrary, a present replica. Perhaps its originality does not longer lie on the constituting material but on its design.

It is on this point that alternative theories and new contributions to the history of restoration, specifically in the restoration of contemporary art, must be quoted. Among them, *Theory of the Project* by Francesco Lo Savio, an artistic theory contemporary to Brandi's, who places the importance of art in the idea and not in the material creation. Lo Savio claims that: "The artist assumed the project in itself as the most significant part of the artistic process, an original and decisive act in the artistic creation, that is why he assigns the realization to others. For him, the physical production does not count since the work is already completed as a project, before formulating the idea, with all numbers and measures necessary to its possible production"<sup>18</sup>.

Contemporary art gives priority to the idea over the material aspect of the work of art, which decisively conditions contemporary art's restoration, leading internationally-reckoned restoration criteria into crisis. Therefore in the restoration of contemporary art the material is admitted to be replaced, whereas in old art there is a sacred-like respect for it. This obsession for the material is a concept inherited from the Enlightenment and Romanticism, historical movements which laid the basis of contemporary art collection and antiquarianism were.

To this respect we might point out the statements by the theoretician and restorer Antonio Rava, who notes the fact that, in many cases, the artifact is not cre-

17 BEERKENS, H., "Reconstruction of a moving life". In VV.AA. *Modern art, who cares?* Amsterdam. Foundation for the conservation of modern art and the Netherlands institute for Cultural Heritage, 1998, pp. 23-41.

18 VV.AA., *Conservar el arte contemporáneo*. San Sebastián, Nerea, 1992. p. 85.

ated by the artist's own hands, unlike conventional painting and sculpture, hence the necessity of new conservation practices which are still being under consideration nowadays, regarding the transmission of the artistic message to the future. And if, in order to transmit the original message, the substitution of elements is required, that would be a legitimate act as far as new information of the date of the change is provided<sup>19</sup>.

On the other hand, if we look at the traditional theory relating the patina, Cesare Brandi states that its conservation as a testimony of the passing time is not only advisable but absolutely compulsory. On the contrary, in contemporary art there are a lot of restorations, in big size sculptures above all, which are polished, repainted and chromate, erasing even the original paint layers. In this way, in a clear confrontation to Brandi's theories, not only the aesthetic condition of the material is disrespected, since it is completely substituted, but also its historical instance is lost to a great extent when the different polychromes are erased, losing the patina Brandi emphatically defends in his writings.

These interventions, common to many museums and contemporary art centers, are opposed to Brandi's theories, since he defended the maximum respect to the original. However, in contemporary art the potential unity of the work of art is sometimes detached from the work itself, that is, the work is just a means to transmit the potential unity, never an end in itself. Therefore in contemporary art restoration the investigation and deep knowledge of both the work of art and its message are so important in order to discern the importance given by the artist to the material over the idea or concept to be expressed.

Regarding the recognition of the intervention without committing the false historicism that Brandi praises, he adopted the reintegrating systems to his purpose, making reintegration by means of hatching, linear hatching, and contoured hatching and, regarding color, different techniques were used such as neutral ink, color selection, chromatic abstraction, etc. However, in contemporary art these reintegration techniques, far from helping to keep the potential unity of the work of art, have a significant role and, in most cases, distort the very concept of the work. The recognition of the reintegration frequently makes it difficult or alters the potential unity of the work, in such cases a repaint is considered more appropriate than a distinguishable reintegration.

There was not a systematized solution to this problem. Every work in particular needs a different action adapted to its content. In the context of contemporary art it seems difficult to admit a monochromatic painting by Mondrian to be refilled with a clearly distinguishable *tratteggio* or pointillism since it would imply a figurative stain in the aesthetic contemplation of the piece, but, on the other hand,

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19 Rava. A., "Form and Memory...", in *op. cit.*, p. 150.

it seems difficult to admit from the point of view of the theory of restoration the mimetic reintegration of such an avant-garde piece if we comply to the traditional issues of restoration such as respect for the original material, the visibility of the intervention and its repetition.

Regarding this, Giorgio Bonsanti<sup>20</sup> states that according to today's Italian theory the impossibility to consider the restoration of a lacuna by means of chromatic selection in works such as those by Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning or similar is under consideration. Although these works of art may be defined as "paintings" made on so said traditional supports (perhaps a synthetic canvass, but a canvass after all), even so the repainting of a lacuna with the intention to be visually distinguishable would become completely incompatible with the technique of "dripping" or with the abstract gesture.

Regarding the reversibility of the treatment, being a questionable point in early art where the materials used are well known and in many cases it is unavoidable that practice contradicts theory carrying out irreversible processes, in contemporary art whose materials—as we have already pointed out— may be completely unusual, such an issue is questioned from the very beginning. If we add that, in many cases the nature of the material is made dependent on its concept, this issue would be unfounded, since we may find that the decomposing process of many materials (and so of the work itself), is part of the concept itself, therefore emerging a contradiction inherent to the work itself: in order to keep the potential unity of the work of art in the conceptual level we must allow for its self-destruction, that is, we have to let it vanish in order to preserve it.

Therefore, as we have seen, the theory of restoration by the Italian Cesare Brandi is contradicted by the restoration practice, and it is this empirical statement that the German restorer and art historian Heinz Althöfer pioneered in 1985 in his book *Restoration of Contemporary Painting. Tendencies, materials, techniques*<sup>21</sup>. In his book, Althöfer stressed a deep change in contemporary art restoration which made clear a break with the Brandian thought. The German restorer approached the work of art from a perspective closer in time being his attitude towards it not to consider it a historic document respectable in its materiality, but rather a manifesto of intentions to be reinterpreted in order to update the message of the work without losing the original significance the artist meant, since for Althöfer the value of the work of art lay precisely there. Althöfer considered the existing theory and practice an obstacle in the praxis of the new artistic tendencies, declaring himself against the Brandian concept of *potential unity*, defending instead a point of view closer to modernity, giving multiplicity a value as artistic concept, as well as the concept of physical decay as artistic intention.

20 BONSANTI, G., "Proposals for a Theory...", in *op. cit.*, p.126.

21 ALTHÖFER, H., *Restauración de pintura contemporánea. Tendencias, materiales, técnicas*. Ed. Istmo, 2003, Madrid.

In Althöfer's own words: "It is not a question of theoretic issues, similar to that of the neutral retouchment or *tratteggio*, but of previous conditions of great importance, that if not taken into consideration, the work of art would be annihilated not only in its physical existence but in its spiritual existence as well. This is what happens when eat-art works, like Dieter Roth's chocolate dwarfs or Richard Lidner's "Angel with Blue Breast", are bathed into plexiglass"<sup>22</sup>.

The German theoretician considered needful an advance in the problem of the theory of restoration in contemporary art in order to update the criteria of restoration praxis, and not doing it was worse than the absence of technical knowledge; that is why he demanded a philosophical reflection in order to use science and technique rightly, that is, he considered absolutely needful to revisit the theory in order to carry out regulated interventions backed by a strong reflection on contemporary art.

For Althöfer, contemporary art can be grouped into three different levels according to restoration: first of all, works that may be considered and deal with in a similar way to traditional artistic pieces; secondly, those which technically pose new questions that require to test and implement new materials and techniques, and third, those that demand a previous "ideological" analysis to the problem of restoration.

The instances diverting from the traditional theory of restoration are the second and third groups. Regarding the second category, Althöfer considers we should acquire new and deeper knowledge related to new materials and the techniques of today's factories. But in the third group it would be necessary to incorporate a theoretical reflection which incorporate "the new status of modern art and, on the other hand, take into account the different contributions of past and present history of thought"<sup>23</sup>. Althöfer defended that "the work of art determined the conservation methods, and this was also valid to the restoration of that art which refused conservation"<sup>24</sup>. According to this, he placed some major questions to which he did not answer but exposed as unresolved questions in the today's theory: "Art is made to never die, or maybe not? Is art manifestation ambiguous? Is its preservation a mistake? Is restoration essential?"<sup>25</sup> Althöfer questioned even the necessity to preserve art and in such a case, how should we do it. "What seems unbearable is the absolute sacrilege that supposed the restoring intervention that irreversibly

22 ALTHÖFER, H., "Teoría de la restauración del arte contemporáneo", in VV.AA., *Comunicaciones de la 3ª reunión de trabajo*. Grupo Español de trabajo sobre conservación y restauración de arte contemporáneo. Diputación Foral de Álava. Departamento de cultura. Vitoria. 1991. p.100.

23 ALTHÖFER, H., *Teoría de la restauración...*, *op. cit.*, p.11.

24 *Ibidem*.

25 *Ibidem*.

mummified art as an archaeological discovery”<sup>26</sup>. In this sense he advocated for a theory of restoration not guided by scientific and technical improvements but by the knowledge of the work of art and its purpose: “the right interpretation of the work of art is essential to its correct restoration. It is, besides, the main source for information about the object and the artistic purpose”<sup>27</sup>. This approach is very interesting since lay it bare the way the German restorer introduced into the field of restoration, ideas related to contemporary aesthetics and present conceptual art (Beuys, Tinguely, Manzoni, etc), as the acceptance of the work’s decay (even its complete disappearance).

In this context, Hiltrud Schinzel, the German restorer disciple to Althöfer, has provided a new vision to the theory of restoration: that of the viewer. For Schinzel, the problem of contemporary art restoration lies precisely on this aspect: for whom do we restore and what do we want to restore, and so we should ponder whether we want to keep the material as support for an idea which will be part of the history of art, or on the contrary, we want to preserve this concept jeopardizing its support and constantly updating it so as not to lose the essence of the work, the message the author wants to provide. Regarding the meaning of both the material and the content of the work of art, Schinzel underlies how the bipolarity between Brandi (aesthetic and historic), is being overpassed by the bipolarity between the material and the spiritual content in contemporary art<sup>28</sup>.

Schinzel in his theories sets out three reflective contexts: first of all, the intention of contemporary art and its contradictions, secondly, the question of the original and multiplicity, and third, the reversibility as justification of the restoring act. Regarding the first one, Schinzel states how deeply contemporary art is linked to the material that constitutes the work, and, on the other hand, how materiality is full of conceptual symbolic contents, therefore in present restoration any intervention on the material mean an alteration of the idea inherent to it.

That is, Schinzel sets out the existence of a double tendency. On the one hand, the art traditionally understood as material used to depict, this material is adored as fetish and raised to a supreme value regarding the concepts of originality and technical execution by the author-artist, and, on the other hand a series of ordinary objects without artistic value upgraded to works of art by the mere fact of being labeled as such. In this kind of works we can include Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), Warhol’s *Brillo’s Boxes* (1964) or *The Artist’s Breath* (1947) by Pietro Manzoni. On the other hand, in conceptual art the materials are increasingly reduced, ideas and concepts are better expressed by means of a technically perfect art, and

26 ALTHOFER, H., *Teoría de la restauración...*, *op. cit.*, p.12.

27 ALTHOFER, H., *Teoría de la restauración...*, *op. cit.*, p.13.

28 VAN DAMME, C., SCHINZEL, H., “Ethics and the theory of conservation of contemporary art”, En *Modern art, Who cares?...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 308-321.

this surface's perfection is managed more easier by factory processes, "so, the artist's hand is being pushed away to suppression in minimal and narrative art"<sup>29</sup>. Schinzel places the origin of perfect and homogeneous, impersonalized surfaces in constructivism and figures such as Malewich, De Stijl and Bahaus.

In this way Schinzel states that present art remains completely impersonalized, what matters is underlie some kind of originality and the aesthetic aspects of the materials' surfaces and endings, in a such a way that the master touch of the artist's hand disappears, giving way to an art based on the genius of the expressed concept. An example for the above mentioned would be Richard Serra who straightly provides the materials' properties, not reproducing a texture but letting the material to evolve in a natural way.

The problem, so, is how restoration preserves or respects the passing of time in the work of art. Regarding the pictorial space, this is made up by the surfaces' qualities and not by depiction, the material is not longer a means to representation becoming an object in itself, that is why contemporary painting is even closer to the concept of the object as an aesthetic element, not as a characteristic of a depiction but as a symbol for an idea or an aesthetic purpose. In this line we can mention Soulages paintings, of polished or grooved surfaces in neutral colors, often black and technically perfect.

Regarding works of art that use time as an important factor for the artistic creation, process art, we can include James Lee Byars' *The Rose Table of Perfect* (1995), consisting of a EPS ball with thousands of fresh roses withering as the exhibition takes place till they are dried as the exhibition ends making a completely different image. In this case, the artist includes in the work of art the degrading process as a constituent part of it. Therefore the conservation of the dried flowers as a testimony for the work after the exhibition is out of question, despite the technical possibilities for doing so. Anytime the piece is exhibited new flowers must be added, keeping them as long as possible, watering them daily.

Summing up, Schinzel states that contemporary art cannot be regulated by a set of rules, but rather we must investigate about the artist's purpose and his message, sacrificing sometimes the historical value of the original material, which openly contradicts the ideas by Cesare Brandi.

Regarding the Italian theory of restoration, the German restorer denies a positivist historical consciousness, hence her questioning of the defense of the conservation of art at any price. Schnitzel proposes a separation between the linear thought (historic) and the parallel thought (anthropologist), where this kind of contemporary art that makes use of the spectator in a emotional (action art) or intellectual (conceptual art) way would be framed. Therefore, regarding the print

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29 ALTHOFER, H., *Teoría de la restauración...*, op. cit., pp. 49.

of the passing of time in the work of art, Schnizel states that the closer the work is to us, the more repeated, so what must be preserved is the idea. In this way she approves for the possibility of reproducing the work of art, something completely different to Brandi, who claimed that with the reproduction of the work the historic instance would be lost. In Schnizel's own words, the theoretical concept of the immateriality of the contemporary work of art as a pure idea, is linked to the possibility that could be reproduced as an ultimate consequence. However, regarding ephemeral art she states that reproduction is not materially possible, that is, all that is linked to an ephemeral material cannot be repeated in a strict sense. This statement is due to her considering ephemeral art cannot be reproduced nor restore, but it must disappear since that is its purpose. In this way, Schnizel assumes and advocates in her theories not to preserve the work of art but make it disappear, whereas other theoreticians, above all in the Italian world, openly reject any possibility to vanish the work of art as something unavoidable and imminent<sup>30</sup>.

We can conclude, then, that the praxis of the restoration of contemporary art questions Brandi's theories and yet, despite the debate on this issue, there are no unified criteria for restoring contemporary art. Despite the notorious theoretical contributions in this field (Althöfer, Schnizel, etc), there is a controversy between Brandi's advocates and detractors, in fact some of the theoreticians set out the necessity of a new restoration charter<sup>31</sup>.

As a conclusion it is needed to point out a concern of serious consequences related to present art conservation: the absence of unifying criteria, since art today ranges over different artistic manifestations of a great material and conceptual diversity. Therefore, its conservation and restoration is still a challenge without an evident solution, despite the efforts taken in that respect. What does exist, according to the German restorer Hiltrud Schnizel, is a methodology based on documentation, investigation and minimum intervention, aiming at the potential unity, but being aware that this does not longer lie in the physical object, but in the artist's idea or purpose, so we should ask ourselves for whom we restore, since the answer will determine the intervention criteria.

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30 BONSANTI, G., "Proposals for a Theory...", in *op. cit.*, p.129.

31 DE MARTINO, E., "Arte contemporanea: conservazione e restauro", *En Minutes of the International conference held in Venice in October-November*. Turin: Fondazione di Venezia-Allemandi, 2005.