

## Theory of Restauration

LLAZAR KUMARAKU

*POLIS University*



**Author:** Cesare Brandi  
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Cesare Brandi was born in Siena in 1906 and it seems as if the place of birth had a radical influence on his future. Siena has been one of the main centers of art from the end of the Middle Age to the beginning of the Baroque period. In fact, the Sieneese art school is very famous for its initiators such as Duccio di Buoninsegna, Niccolò di Segna or Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Probably Brandi would be inspired by these painters in the moments of his childhood when he started painting. But it is certain that Brandi has studied and restored the works of these authors, by including them in the book "Teoria del Restauro" in which the restorations of the works of artists of the Sieneese school make up a significant part.

"Teoria del Restauro" contains Brandi's writings made during the twenty years he directed the Central Institute of Restoration in Rome from 1939, which was the year when he founded this institute, until 1960 when Brandi left to take up the Chair of Art History in Palermo in 1961 and then in Rome in 1967.

These writings were articulated during the years of the destructions of the Second World War and the rapid post-war reconstruction and contain Brandi's concern to preserve the cultural and artistic heritage, without destroying it, with harmful interventions or reconstructions. From this point of view, the book "Theory of Restoration" constitutes a kind of guardrail that does not allow us to fall into the abyss of tragic mistakes the moment we intervene in a work of art.

The book gives us instructions on how to interfere with the work of art without damaging it. While the instructions can be considered valid at all times, the techniques of how to intervene in the work of art do not have the same value. The techniques proposed by Brandi in this book, such as the graphic technique of "trateggio", neutral color, or the reversibility of a restoration intervention, may seem outdated nowadays.

For instance, nowadays, old cars belonging to a bygone industrial history are considered works of art, and they certainly are. If these cars were to lose part of their original paint due to a possible accident, no one would restore it with the line tech-

nique or neutral color. Likewise, an intervention to consolidate the material of the work of art, which must be reversible, can be viewed with skepticism, because if the work needs intervention in its support, which guarantees the stability of the work, then the removal of this consolidation will again harm the work from the point of view of sustainability.

However, the guidelines and principles remain valid and, moreover, they can also justify the new intervention techniques since Brandi describes the restoration as a "methodological moment of the recognition of the work of art" and adds later that the restoration will be conditioned precisely by this moment, including here the intervention techniques, always if they preserve and respect the general principles.

The first edition of 1963, which was also translated into English in 2005 by the Central Restoration Institute and Nardini Editore, is divided into two main parts: the first deals with the theory of restoration unfolded in eight chapters, while the second part consists of seven annexes that deal with practical problems related to the restoration of works of art. In the second edition, the one published in 1977 by the publishing house Einaudi, the *Carta del Restauro* of 1972 is added to these two parts. The relevance of this book, beyond the English translation of 2005, is emphasized by the reprint of 2022 made by the publishing house La Nave di Teseo. In fact, in parallel with the new edition of 2022 by the above-mentioned publisher, the work was also elaborated in Albania to adapt the book into the Albanian language by Daniela Kavaja and Llazar Kumaraku. The publication in the Albanian language has been taken over by the Polis Press publishing house, which is part of the Resource and Information Center at the Faculty of Research and Development at Polis University.

According to Jokilehto (1999), the subject of the book is the definition of a work of art. It is true that in Brandi's book, defining the work of art and recognizing it are the key points of starting the restoration process, but the rest of the book revolves around the issue of preserving the originality of the work of art. In the chapters that Brandi talks about the matter, that of the time of the work or that of the restoration according to two values, the emphasis is placed on the preservation of the work of art as it has been recognized by consciousness as such and its transmission to future generations without committing aesthetic or historical forgery.

The definition of the work of art in this book is based on the phenomenological approach. Brandi (1977: 4) directly quotes John Dewey referring that a work of art is such at the moment it exists in the consciousness of an individual. For Brand, it is precisely this awareness that has the moral obligation to pass on the work of art to future generations.

The purpose of the book, which is directly related to restoration, is revealed immediately in the first chapter of the *Theory of Restoration*, where Brandi (2005: 48) states that "Restoration consists of the methodological moment in which the work of art is recognized, in its physical being, and in its dual aesthetic and historical nature, in view of its transmission to the future." The transmission of the work in the future, in the state that we know

as such, is precisely the purpose of the restoration of the works of art and also of the book itself. The definition of restoration in this chapter is accompanied by two important axioms which make up the essence of this book. The first axiom (Brandi 2005: 48) quotes that "any way of acting in relation to the work of art, including restoration treatment, depends on its being recognized as a work of art." While the second axiom (Brandi 2005: 49) states that "Only the material of a work of art is restored". On the basis of the above definition and the mentioned two axioms, Cesare Brandi's Restoration Theory is built.

After this definition, the book continues with the clarification of the theory of restoration, detailing the chapters on the matter, the times of the work, and the historical and aesthetic value, ending with a chapter on preventive restoration.

Most part of the book focuses on the two main aspects mentioned above which make up the essence of restoration. These two aspects are the preservation of the originality of the work of art and its transmission to future generations. These two aspects must accompany the work of every restorer in such a way that we preserve the historical and cultural heritage of a people and for this reason, Cesare Brandi's book appears valuable not only today but contains in its essence an eternal validity.