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# Cesare Brandi (1906 to 1988): his concept of restoration and the dilemma of architecture

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## Abstract

This article offers a theoretical review of the origin of the concept of restoration in Brandi's view, proposing a critique centered on architectural restoration. Brandi's theoretical trajectory is outlined in his approach to the discernment of art in general and architecture in particular, centered around his *Teoria del restauro* (1963b). Through phenomenology, Brandi deduced the essence of the artistic phenomenon without including in restoration other human realities that are integrated into the architecture's existence. His approach was phenomenological in method and ontological in its objectives. The fact that architecture constitutes an important part of human place and its artistic condition, nevertheless broadens the question of what constitutes this human habitable space and which constructions should be conserved.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic, restoration, Brandi, criticism, phenomenology.

## Introduction

Within the context of the theories of conservation of artistic and historical heritage, Cesare Brandi (Siena, 8 April 1906 – Vignano, 19 January 1988) is mainly known for his *Teoria del restauro* (Brandi, 1963). However, his work also includes essays, travelogues, poetry, criticism and art history, as well as theoretical works. In his role as founder and director of the *Istituto Centrale per il Restauro* he was among those responsible for protecting the artistic and architectural heritage in Italy at the end World War II. Given this responsibility, Brandi always felt committed to defending conservation actions with rigorous theoretical reasoning.

This article offers a theoretical review of the origin of the concept of restoration in Brandi's thought in order to additionally propose a critique, centered on the restoration of architecture, which is considered to be missing from his approach. I will refer mainly to his concept of restoration as defined in the *Enciclopedia universale dell'arte* (1963a). This definition is contemporary and fundamentally the same as the one included in his famous *Teoria del restauro* (1963b); it was published as a compendium of his restoration lessons, in which his proposal is synthesized and where the expression of its principles is more immediate.

In spite of its complexity, his theory is considered to be one of his main conceptual contributions in the field of conservation and restoration, based on the principles of phenomenological philosophy. Like other examples of his theoretical writings, the language used by Brandi may seem obscure and pretentious, and it is possible that this perception is not entirely unjustified.

One of his most ambitious works, his *Teoria generale della critica* (1973), is example enough of the challenge of understanding the issues faced by most, but which Brandi navigated with ease. Thus, the definition of restoration that he offered in his theory presupposes a familiarity with his theoretical and philosophical framework that the average reader, even one from within the world of conservation, does not always possess. It is not rare to find publications, not only from his time, but even current, where even conservation specialists venture to refute his theoretical arguments with the legitimacy that the case would require, without criticizing Brandi from a phenomenological framework. For this same reason, the application of his principles without an informed critical sense, no matter how well-intentioned, can give rise to questionable intervention treatments. Let us establish, then, that his *Teoria del restauro* is based on the philosophical postulates of phenomenology, relating, therefore, to the experience of the reception of art in human consciousness. While Brandi suggests in his postulates that only the material part of the work of art is restored, his theory has represented a challenge for those who expect to find practical guidelines in it, more linked to the practice of restoration than to art criticism as he conceived it, and not the need for a change in our epistemological approach to the work.

In Cesare Brandi's thought, legitimate architecture emerges in human consciousness as a work of art. For him, art is considered to be the apex of human creation, and must, therefore, be protected. According to him, the moment in which, through a critical approach, we identify a work of architecture as a work of art, is the only one suitable for its restoration. The intervention treatment in restoration does not necessarily imply doing something. Rarely, but still possibly as a result of this critical approach, it may turn out that it is not necessary to act, but only to guarantee the legacy of the future of that work of art through conservation.

By the 1960s, Brandi had been theorizing for several decades on art and architecture from that phenomenological perspective. However, it is not until he published his *Teoria generale della critica* (1974) that it is possible to identify his complete philosophical framework and his approach to the theory of art and architecture included as such. In this complicated and ambitious work, Brandi tried to explain, in a way that many of his critics find too elaborate, the phenomenon of art, including architecture, making use of phenomenology, both from the point of view of Husserl and of Heidegger, existentialism, deconstruction and semiotics. In this publication, Brandi suggested two possible ways in which *theoretical knowledge* manifests itself: theoretical knowledge is either *history or critique*. He was attempting to analyze the implications that this alternative identification had in the debate regarding actions works of art and architecture. His task was not modest and the arguments in this text exceed in depth, detail and complexity those expressed in his *Teoria del restauro*, where architecture appears more simply integrated as an art form, analogous to the figurative arts.

### **Philosophical background of his theory**

The philosophical landscape in Italy in the 1950s systematically made its relationship with neo-idealism. That is, the identification with a philosophy of the *spirit*, of the systems of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile. At that time, there was a complete skepticism towards any attempt to define an unequivocal concept of art given the attacks made from phenomenological positions (D'Angelo, 2006a: 27). Already in 1952, in an article published on the occasion of Benedetto Croce's death, Gillo Dorfles identified the most representative scholars of aesthetics in Italy. Dorfles suggested that after the war, Italian thinking was attempting to distance itself from Croce's idealistic domain (Dorfles, 1953: 184-188, 193; Simoni, 1952: 7-14). In this article, Brandi was included in the group of academics who combined idealism, formalism and Sartre's existentialism. It is revealing that Brandi chose a path whose definitions of art departed from the key concepts of idealism, even though

he was always accused of being an idealist scholar from Croce's school. This accusation was systematically repeated during his career.<sup>1</sup> However, Brandi's theoretical philosophical path gradually separated from Croce's dogmas (Dorfles, 1953: 196). By then Brandi was using sources that were not yet commonly used in Italy; references to authors such as Sartre, Husserl, Heidegger and Kant give an account of the originality of his theoretical frameworks.<sup>2</sup> From his first writings, Brandi dismissed some of Croce's aesthetic theories, such as the notion that art is language and some concepts related to the temporality of the work of art, using phenomenological and structuralist arguments. Although the influence of Croce on Brandi is undeniable, it is in the distancing of the idea of art as an expression that Brandi demonstrated, with a phenomenological methodology in his *Teoria generale della critica*, his intellectual independence and his most advanced judgment.

As we will explain below, on one hand Brandi established a relationship between appearance (image) and concept, incorporating the Kantian theory of transcendental schematism. By reconfiguring this theory by Kant, Brandi distinguished between language and art in his *Carmines* (1945), later in *Le due vie* (1966) and finally in the *Teoria generale della critica* (1974) in a much more elaborate way. On the other hand, in his phenomenology, Husserl had developed Kant's idea of a separation between reality itself (*noumena*) and perceived reality (*phenomenon*). Husserl postulated that every act of consciousness is consciousness of something and he developed the theory of phenomenology as a method to find the essence of things themselves, or in other words to reveal the *noumenon*. Thus, Brandi structured his theory on knowledge and the experience of art mainly by coherently relating these two theoretical frameworks, schematism and phenomenology.

However, idealist philosophy never ceased to manifest itself in Brandi's arguments even if used as a critical, dialectical and often antagonistic point of reference. When in 1946 Croce commented Brandi's *Carmines*, he suggested that the book was of idealistic character trying to assimilate it in his school of thought (Croce, 1946: 81-82). Likewise, despite being one of the supporters of the phenomenological school in art criticism in Italy, Brandi was always accused of merely exchanging the methodological frameworks, while subjecting them to his initial idealism (D'Angelo, 2006a; Morpurgo, 1960a; 1960b). It can be said, however, that although his idealist origin is undeniable, Brandi offered important contributions that allowed him to migrate towards more contemporary trends of criticism and art theory.

For example, within an idealistic framework, Hegel associated art and history with the material, considering art as the highest expression of the spirit over the course of time that manifests itself as culture. Brandi rethought the aesthetics of Hegel by proposing his distinction between the two concepts that he coined, namely: *flagranza* and *astanza* (presence). Along with these phenomenological premises he rejected any metaphysical dimension of spiritual nature.

One significant point is that Brandi was able to overcome idealism by coherently making these two concepts evolve, *flagranza* and *astanza*, within this phenomenological framework, proving his intellectual independence and integrating more recent trends of critical thinking. As already mentioned, Brandi contradicted the concept of art as a form of expression that had influenced Italian aesthetics for a long time. In *Celso*, Brandi ironically wrote: "The aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> This misrepresentation has been abundantly explored, see D'Angelo (2006a: 14; 2006b). At that time, Croce had the same type of stigmatization with regards to Hegelianism, see Simoni (1952: 7-14).

<sup>2</sup> See D'Angelo (2006a: 15, 36). In his review of Brandi's *Carmines*, Croce praised Brandi's work for its theoretical content. However, by depicting Brandi as his disciple, Croce was trying to make Brandi's ideas dependent on his own thinking, emphasizing more the confirmations of his own philosophy than Brandi's original ideas. See Croce (1946).

synthesis? The aesthetic synthesis to call a taxi?"<sup>3</sup> (Brandi, 1957: 27). Brandi argued that art did not communicate in a manner analogous to language, as Croce had suggested. Brandi proposed that the essence of art was in its *astanza*. *Astanza* as pure immaterial presence that is revealed there, but that does not exist in the material substance.

Brandi respected Croce's philosophy on its own merits. However, he implicitly criticized Croce's aesthetic theory through works such as his dialogues in *Elicona* (Brandi, 1945; 1956; 1957), a series of books in the form of classic dialogues in which the characters debated about the different fine arts. Brandi's distinction between the process of creating the work of art and the process of its reception, characterized important objections to previous and contemporary approaches, most of them originated in Italy due to the need to overcome an era dominated by the influence of Croce

In Western culture, and conservation is no exception in this, there is a marked inclination towards the visual, which is evident in the persistence of the image. For Brandi's aesthetic, as well as for his theory of restoration, the visual image is favored as the place of the manifestation of that pure presence that he calls *astanza*. However, in architecture it can be said that the image favored by conservation is not always artistic. Despite the privileged nature of the visual image, there are other bodily perceptions that could be, phenomenologically, the first experiences we have of our human spatiality. Arguably, in human beings, the first space perceived in some way is the maternal womb, then one's own body, the space that one occupies through it and the fluid that surrounds it, although without making a distinction between oneself and the environment. At this primordial level, we are as one with our environment. After birth, the air we breathe becomes part of us as we inhale it and separates from us when we exhale. One could think that the limits of our body are not defined clearly. This awareness that the body is somehow nested in the environment remains hidden from the gaze of modernity and, as a consequence, the architectural place is not conceived as an environment, but as buildings which are physical entities and mathematically definable spaces.

The architectural image is not reduced to the visual, objecting to Brandi and for that matter to much contemporary criticism as well, but to the articulation of the different forms of sensory perception. The conception of architecture limited to the visual image arises from a part of the performance of the body and the recognized meaning when perceiving the image of architecture as representation. The images of the architectural place throughout our life constitute a reserve within which we can distinguish more complex constructions of meaning, such as mythical or historical ones. In the issue of architectural conservation, the image of the architectural place, understood as sensual apprehension, cannot simply be avoided; instead, it needs to be considered properly, as part of the architectural complexity and not as its entirety. This conceptualization of architecture as the envelope of human being in all its corporality and not only limited to the visual is one of the starting points for an existential critique of the concept of restoration in Brandi's theory proposed in this article.<sup>4</sup>

### **His concept of art, architecture and their consequences in restoration**

Brandi found in Kant's schematism theory the appropriate framework to explain the creation and reception of the work of art, including architecture. While the relationship between schematism and figurative art might seem more obvious, Brandi aimed for his theory to also

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<sup>3</sup> Original quotation: "La sintesi estetica? La sintesi estetica per chiamare un taxi?".

<sup>4</sup> See also Meraz (2008; 2009; 2016: 167-182).

explain architecture as a manifestation of art. Consequently, through the character of Eftimio in *Eliante o della architettura* (*Eliante* hereafter), he suggested that architecture in its creation does not originate in a preconceived image of the architectural object, but in a scheme that registers a practical necessity.

*When one begins to have a need for which there is not yet an object to satisfy it (for example, the need for shelter felt by the first hominids and that was still not materialized in the shape of a house), in our consciousness, one has no more than a scheme of the necessity for which one seeks satisfaction that is still not an image. It is the core of a substantial knowledge that aims at becoming a form; it is the shape that the first humans identified in the cave and transferred to the primitive hut later on. There was no concept or image before, but only an inaccurate intentionality within the vital consciousness, the necessity for a shelter against weather, the dangers of beasts and other humans, and who knows what else (Brandi, 1956: 122-3).<sup>5</sup>*

This approach is further developed in *Teoria generale della critica* by suggesting that the scheme is related to both: concept and image. To distinguish the image from the sign, Brandi defines his two key notions: *flagranza* and *astanza*. *Flagranza*, fragrance, is the way in which things exist in their being and can be perceived. On the other hand, for Brandi, *astanza* is the specific way of being of the work of art as *pure presence*. This is defined in opposition to fragrance, which is the way for ordinary things to be present and which Brandi calls *existential reality*. It has been observed that while in *Le due vie* (1966), *astanza* and pure reality are used almost as synonyms, in *Teoria generale della critica* Brandi definitely substituted pure reality with the term *astanza*. It has already been pointed out, as evidence of Brandi's originality, the fact that he founded the concept of *astanza* based on then little-cited philosophical currents, such as those of Heidegger and Derrida (D'Angelo, 2006a: 31).

Brandi innovated by using these philosophical frameworks when conceptualizing architecture, in particular when the crisis of modern architecture started becoming evident. He was a skeptic of the modern movement of architecture. He wrote *Eliante*, presenting his ideas about how and why architecture is art. He places the scenes of this dialogue in Italy following World War II, where a group of friends gathers to discuss how architecture had been affected after the conflict by the new trends. The argument mainly considered the validity of the modern movement in its different expressions, but it also referred to the problems it posed to historical conservation (Carboni, 1992).

Brandi dismissed both rationalism and organic architecture as architectural art because, according to him and from his Kantian schematism, in these two tendencies, the image was not formulated; in the case of organic architecture in particular, not even an object was properly constituted (D'Angelo, 2006a: 78). It has been observed that

*The Eliante included the verdict of the impossibility of modern buildings being inserted in urban contexts of past times, due to their specific spatiality that is absolutely different from that of any other time and, therefore, in all cases incapable of harmonizing with them (D'Angelo, 2006a: 78).<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Original quotation: "Quando ti parti da un bisogno a cui non corrisponde ancora nessun oggetto esterno, e, ad esempio, da quel bisogno primordiale di riparo che dovettero sentire i primi ominidi e che ancora non si condensava nel concetto e nella figura della casa, tu, in quel bisogno a cui, nel prenderne coscienza, cerchi una soddisfazione, hai né più né meno che uno schema, il quale non è ancora immagine. È il nucleo della sostanza conoscitiva la quale cerca prima di tutto di convertirsi in figuratività: la figuratività che i primi rozzi uomini identificarono nella caverna e trasferirono poi alla capanna. Ma appunto, avanti che la capanna sorgesse, non esisteva né concetto né immagine, esisteva solo, interiormente alla coscienza vitale dell'uomo, una imprecisa intenzionalità, quel bisogno di riparo dalle intemperie, dai pericoli delle belve e degli altri uomini e che so io".

<sup>6</sup> Original quotation: "L'Eliante si concludeva con un altro drastico verdetto, l'impossibilità che edifici moderni vengano inseriti in contesti urbani di altre epoche, a causa de la loro spazialità, assolutamente distinta di qualsiasi altra epoca e quindi incapace in tutti casi di armonizzare con quest'ultima".

According to Brandi, on one hand, the Modern Movement represented a rejection of the figurative tradition that forced the discipline of rationalist architecture to become theory and praxis simultaneously: concept and act at the same time. On the other hand, the organic architecture evidenced, according to him, the problem of the process of formation of architecture and not of architecture itself (Brandi, 1956: 105, 115).

Brandi distinguished his particular emphasis in restoration from other modern approaches to conservation, by limiting it to the aesthetic phenomenon (Brandi, 2005: 47). The deduction of Brandi's theory constituted a phenomenological operation, based on an explanation of how art presents itself to consciousness. In this theory Brandi defined restoration as "the methodological moment in which the work of art is recognised, in its physical being, and in its dual aesthetic and historical nature, in view of its transmission to the future" (Brandi, 2005: 48). Therefore, in order to undertake a conservation treatment, he conceived architecture as art and, in doing so, he privileged some integrated aspects within the complex architectural ontology, but unfortunately relegating others.

In *Eliante*, Brandi phenomenologically approached the process of creation in architecture as a work of art. This process was fundamentally inspired by Kantian schematism. However, in *Teoria del restauro*, Brandi argued from the point of view of the reception of the work of art. In these theoretical postulates, it is suggested that art takes place when it is formulated and then reappears, suggesting a complementary temporality of the work of art that closes the cycle of creation-reception.<sup>7</sup> Architecture as a work of art therefore creates a timeless gap between creation (Architecture as Art t1, in Figure 1) and reception (Architecture as Art t2, in Figure 1), in which art potentially survives, but does not manifest itself in reality (Brandi, 2005: 48). Figure 1 offers the references Brandi makes in some of his main texts regarding this process.

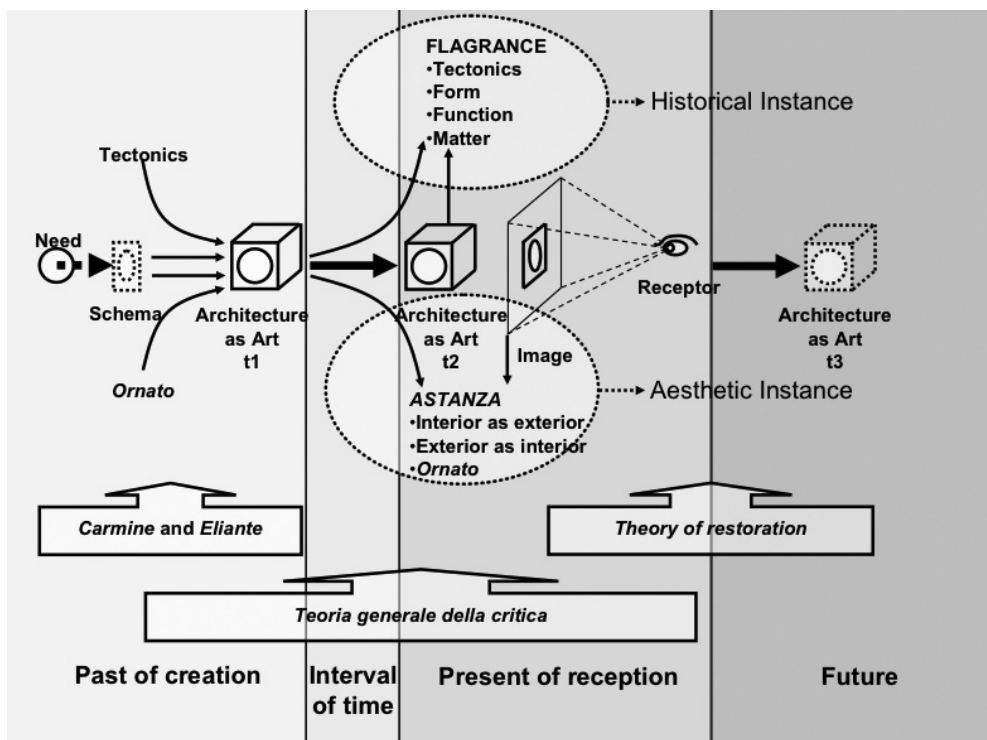


FIGURE 1. ARCHITECTURE'S TEMPORALITY AS DEDUCED FROM BRANDI'S THEORIES.  
Image: Diagram by the author.

<sup>7</sup> Brandi coincided with John Dewey on this matter, see Brandi (2005: 48) and Dewey (1934).

Brandi argued that the reception of architecture in consciousness occurs in two cases: the aesthetic case and the historical case. Significantly, for conservation purposes, Brandi did not consider utility as another significant case of the work. Use in architecture in his concept of restoration is only a determinant to reach its physical form and for maintenance purposes (Brandi, 2005: 47-80). For him, the temporality of architecture as a work of art, its existence, ends with the loss of its aesthetic case. That loss causes a ruin and, therefore, the time between creation and reception leaves only the vestiges of the work. Therefore, for him, the material in the present constitutes the only time and place for restoration (Brandi 2005: 49-51).

The relationship between Brandi and the Modern Movement as a subject for architectural and urban conservation was difficult, especially in places of historical importance, not only in terms of its spatiality but in terms of its temporality (or historicity). Brandi suggested:

*Each work of art constitutes a monument that is presented doubly: both as a historical monument, and as an art monument. If the aesthetic case is considered the priority, insofar as it is on this basis that the work of art is a work of art, it is necessary to reconcile it with the historical case, precisely because it is essential not to destroy the work of art over the passage of time since it is the means of historical transmission the art monument has. We have explained this thoroughly in our Theory of restoration, but precisely in this theory, because it refers to the principles and the practice related to the conservation and transmission into the future of a work of art, the possibility of new additions could only marginally be included, and only when they were necessary for the stability of the work or for completing the reading continuity of the figurative text. (...) On the one hand, the critic recommends not to alter the work, on the other, the artist intends to retake it, interpolate it, continue it. (...) In the first [case], we receive the work of art as a work of art (...) in the second, we assume the work of art as an object to which, in whole or in part, we have the intention to give a new formulation (Brandi, 1994: 37-38).<sup>8</sup>*

On the contrary, and around those same years, the philosopher Gadamer suggested an aesthetic negotiation between new and modern buildings and their historical context. Against historicism, Gadamer wrote that

*even if in historically-minded ages try to reconstruct the architecture of an earlier age, they cannot turn back the wheel of history, but must mediate in a new and better way between the past and the present. Even the restorer or the preserver of ancient monuments remains an artist of his time (Gadamer, 1989: 156-7).*

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<sup>8</sup> Original quotation: "Si sa che ogni opera d'arte è monumento che si presenta in modo biforme, come monumento storico e come monumento d'arte. Se l'istanza estetica ha la priorità, in quanto è in base a questa che l'opera d'arte è opera d'arte occorre il contemperamento con l'istanza storica, proprio perché è tassativo di non distruggere il passaggio dell'opera nel tempo che è il modo stesso di trasmissione storica che ha avuto il monumento d'arte. Ciò abbiamo compiutamente espresso nella nostra *Teoria del restauro*, ma appunto in questa teoria, proprio perché riguarda i principi e la prassi relativi alla conservazione e trasmissione al futuro di un'opera d'arte, non poteva non rientrare che marginalmente la eventualità di nuove inserzioni, se non ed in quanto erano necessarie per la statica dell'opera o per una continuità di lettura del testo figurativo. (...) Da un lato il critico intima di non manomettere l'opera, dall'altra l'artista pretende di riprenderla, interpolarla, continuarla. (...) Nel primo (caso), accogliamo l'opera d'arte come opera d'arte (...) nel secondo, facciamo ridiscendere l'opera d'arte ad oggetto a cui, in tutto o in parte, intendiamo dare una nuova formulazione".

Here the difference between Gadamer and Brandi is illustrative. While for the former, even the *preserver*, and certainly the restorer, are still being artists of their time; for the latter, the *restorer* is not an artist but a critic. Restoration for Brandi is nothing more than a methodological recognition of the work of art as a fact already concluded, not as something to work with (Brandi, 2005: 48). On the other hand, Gadamer understands that restoration implies an artistic activity because, for him, architecture has the mission of mediating spatially between drawing attention to itself and redirecting it to the world which architecture accompanies (Gadamer, 1989). Architecture, for Gadamer, is not as important as an attractive artistic object, but as the sanctuary of human existence. This example suggests that the approach to the architectural work of art is different from the one directed towards other forms of art. In the context of the intervention of the new in the existing, for Gadamer, architecture is related to Heidegger's notion of dwelling, while for Brandi it represents almost exclusively an exceptional artistic epiphany. The comparison of these two perspectives reveals some of the contradictions that could be attributed to Brandi, in particular regarding to architecture as a place in a permanent state of change.

### His debate against the new in the old

Brandi had significant contributions in the context of the development of *restauro critico*. This approach included a series of principles and arguments, with which his followers often contradicted each other, particularly when they were faced with the restoration of works in the aftermath of World War II. The controversy surrounding the intervention of the new in the existing would be significant for this generation of restoration theorists in Italy. From the 1960s, Brandi's *Teoria del restauro* would be recognized as a fundamental theoretical instrument for intervention treatments in the conservation of monumental heritage, for example, in the context of the activities of the then-called *Istituto Centrale del Restauro* in Rome.<sup>9</sup> An obvious example of those concerns is the article published in 1964 about the insertion of the new into the old, published first in the *Fiera Letteraria* (Brandi, 1964) and then included in *Struttura e architettura* (Brandi, 1967).

In this article Brandi argues against the insertion of new architecture in the context of the ancient city, defining the chronological limit of the authentic to 150 years before the publication of that text. Brandi operated in that paper by comparing intervention treatments in the ancient city with literary philological criticism and he distinguished that with critical knowledge one can edit the content of an ancient text, even though it is not lawful to intervene on the original manuscript without the risk of destroying it; on the contrary in architecture, the modification of the buildings would permanently transform its historical text (Brandi, 1964). Brandi questioned the legitimacy and the insertions that aspire to contribute with a new artistic expression inserted in the historical context.

Brandi's *Teoria del restauro* strictly applied to architecture would not only be a mere way of conserving architecture but also a peculiar manner of identifying that architecture as art. His idea relates two times: the act of the formulation of the work of art and the moment of its recognition as art by the conscience of someone different. Such recognition occurs in time, but Brandi postulated that it belongs to the universal consciousness (Brandi, 2005: 49). When Brandi developed the problem of the oneness of the work of art, he suggests that the work

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<sup>9</sup> The ISCR *Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro*, formerly called *Istituto Centrale di Restauro*, is a prestigious center for the study, conservation and restoration of cultural heritage. It offers scientific and technical advice at an international level, and it has a school of conservation, and associated publications. See the website of the *Istituto Superiore per Conservazione ed il Restauro* [<http://www.iscr.beniculturali.it/home.cfm>]. As an example of the initiatives organized on the legacy of Brandi, see the Associazione Amici di Cesare Brandi [<http://www.cesarebrandi.org/>].

will continue to exist as a potential whole in each of its fragments (Brandi, 2005: 57). This consideration within the aesthetic case of integration as a unique work, must be properly reconciled with the historical case. For Brandi, the historicity of the work is defined between two extremes: on one side, the formulation of the work, on the other, its critical reception in the human consciousness as a work of art. The historical case will only take precedence when the work of art has lost all possibility of being perceived.

However, if we consider Brandi's theory applied to historical urban contexts, where architectural works overlap in their times of creation, which sometimes last for many years or do not end in a definitive way, it is paradoxical that Brandi appealed to reasons that are alien to his theoretical framework, when he argues about the additions of modern edification in monumental contexts. In his theory he suggested that, if a building is qualified as architecture, that is to say as art, given the contrasting spatial qualities that characterize modern architecture, the insertion of modern architecture in an old context is unacceptable (Brandi, 2005: 83). With this argument he seemed to condemn the historic city to remain unchanged. Brandi established in his theory that monuments, if they are architecture and consequently works of art, should be subject to the same restoration principles. However, it can be argued that in the inhabited artistic and monumental architecture, in addition to aesthetic values, there are additional ones that can be identified.<sup>10</sup>

### **The challenge of postmodernity to Brandi's ontological project**

In the previous section, we discussed Brandi's ideas in the context of what was probably his most characteristic role: that of an art critic as a restorer, and it can be said that he was one philosophically prepared. However, the fact that conservation is a social action should not be overlooked. Brandi aspired for conservation to be based on solid philosophical foundations. However, how did Brandi conceive the relationship between society and art? In his architecture and theory of restoration, Brandi did not address any sociological or ideological aspect, but his approach was purely ontological. In this way he moved away from the "meta-assumptions of critical theory" (Robert, 1983: 343-344). His implicit premise seemed to be that a relevant practice of architecture, and therefore of its restoration, should be based on an ontological certainty which, as will be discussed later, has been disavowed in postmodern thinking.

Brandi, for example, was skeptical of Marxist interpretations that analyzed artistic, architectural and urban phenomena. In his time, a series of theories clearly opted for this trend. Among others, the approaches of Manfredo Tafuri (who accused Brandi of being a metaphysical mystical neo-idealist) when relating architecture, a productive process and the consumer ideology, are just an example (Prestinzenza, 1998). In contrast, what Brandi pursued theoretically was a phenomenology of architecture. He ontologically approached art and architecture as a starting point from which an eventual intrinsic structure and consequently an awareness of architecture would emerge. In *Progetto e utopia*, Tafuri (1973a), on the other hand, structurally analyzed architecture and the city as a result of the ideological transformations of society. He conceived them as the place of technological production and their manifestation. For Tafuri, architecture needed to accept its status as a market product, to abandon utopia and enter realism. The ideology of consumption in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became the ideology of the correct use of the city (Tafuri, 1973a: 47-8).

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<sup>10</sup> See also Meraz (2008).

Tafuri's criticism focused on society as a user of architecture more than on architecture itself. He elaborated a discourse from the architectural phenomenon and towards its external consequence. Without losing contact with the discipline of architecture, as a historian, he saw architecture more as mediation between the individual and society (Tafuri, 1973a; 1973b). What Brandi was looking for instead was to individualize the architecture with a phenomenological methodology. In this sense, Brandi invited actions to protect culturally significant architecture by grounding the praxis of restoration on ontological bases. However, the criticism of the artistic phenomenon of his approach should not exclude the possibility of linking this criticism with other aspects of society.

In his time, Brandi's approaches were innovative through the use of conceptual instruments that criticized art and architecture within phenomenology. He refuted as unsustainable any teleological cause over the subjectivity of art (Brandi, 1974: 27). Therefore, if we consider his architectural and restoration theories, Brandi seemed to argue that, given that these proposals are philosophically sound, they should lead to an adequate practice. However, this ontological approach did not comfortably reconcile the multifaceted arguments of what is broadly conceived as critical theory, or later within other schools of postmodern thought. It is likely that this is one of the reasons why his contributions did not attract the attention of the architectural scholars of that time, especially those who were not familiar with the Romance languages. Much of the architectural debate of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that has been published in English was somehow related to the concerns of critical theory.<sup>11</sup> Brandi's theoretical journey, instead, arose from an ontological project whose importance was openly disqualified in the dawn of postmodern paradigms that objected to the search for essential truths.

The strong relationship of Brandi's thinking with society, however, is manifested in his actions to protect the artistic and architectural heritage of Italy. An example of such actions is his role in the founding of the *Istituto Centrale del Restauro* in Rome, now called *Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro*, of which he was director from 1939 to 1959 (Brandi, 1995). Another example is his active participation, with his theories of restoration as a guide for an adequate practice, and the influence his theory had on the Italian *Carta del restauro* of 1972. His legacy in art criticism, rescue and restoration projects, and significantly in his still relevant *Teoria del restauro* has recently been reassessed.<sup>12</sup> We sustain here that an updated revision of his theory emerges as a relevant necessity within the current context of architectural conservation.

In *Teoria generale della critica*, Brandi conceived history as the paradigm of knowledge. However, for him history is not the only type of knowledge. Science is the other key paradigm. Brandi then conceived these two aspects: first, history, which studies semiosis, in other words, the relationship between signifier and signified. He identified the study of flagrance as the second branch which is divided into flagrance of the real, studied by the sciences, and the *astanza*, which is studied by art criticism. It is in this sense that the *Teoria generale della critica* received such title: in other words, the critique of art (Brandi, 1974). Brandi argued that in the development of different research paradigms in postmodern times there had been an

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<sup>11</sup> Critical theory is understood here in a broad sense, as Bohman invites us to do, even if Brandi's theories were not so much aimed at towards a social emancipation, but rather to the elimination of the sophisms of his time. However, these theories did not aspire to be "descriptive and normative bases aimed at diminishing domination and enhancing liberty in all its forms". See Bohman (2005).

<sup>12</sup> During 2006 and 2007, the celebrations of the centennial of Cesare Brandi's birth motivated the organization of eight national conferences, one itinerant exhibition, the publication of a dictionary of Brandi in various languages and the translation of his *Teoria del restauro* into Spanish, English, Romanian, Czech, French, Greek, Portuguese, Japanese and German. See Brandi (1995).

epistemological shift from teleology to contingency. He therefore suggested the existence of structures that the historian should reveal through his research. For him, history needed to overcome limitations, such as the notion of a historical teleology or relations of causality that suggested a holistic structural system. With different approaches, Brandi suggested, as other postmodern scholars, the rejection of the ideologies of the great narratives.

Certainly, Brandi did not ignore the Marxist critique deriving from critical theory and, as it can be deduced later from his *Teoria generale della critica*, he adopted his own divergent position. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the decline of idealism, various philosophical tendencies emerged (for example, neo-Kantianism, Marxist interpretation, critical theory, or from the 1960s onwards, variants of postmodern criticism). Among the perspectives of his time, Brandi endorsed phenomenology and existentialism instead of the integration of philosophy with social sciences as critical theory invited to do.

Brandi criticized Marxism as an objectification of the human being by focusing on the relations of production. In his opinion, dialectical materialism "(...) represents a rigid centralization and a leveling of history for which a single key is offered" (Brandi, 1974: 15).<sup>13</sup> We can appreciate that Brandi was aware that it was possible to identify different levels of analysis in different aspects of reality. However, he rejected any attempt to give history a fixed and constant structure. For example, he compared this alleged reduction of history with the case of science in which the principles of indetermination and complementarity would not have limited its progress (Brandi, 1974: 14).

Even though he participated in the debate about the crisis of the Modern Movement, Brandi, as an architecture critic, endorsed neither organic architecture nor functionalism.

*His discussion, mainly expressed in the Eliante and in Struttura e architettura, was based on a latent awareness that architecture was at the same time a phenomenon composed of organic and rational aspects. Therefore, Brandi rejected the binary opposition of functionalism-organism and he suggested the impossibility for architecture of being "only functional without denying itself as architecture and reducing itself to a constructive passivity" (Sbacchi, 2006: 151).<sup>14</sup>*

Thus, another reason for the lack of visibility of his theories in the context of architectural theory could be found in the patent decrease in interest of ontological type from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The influence of postmodern criticism with its burden of indetermination and relativism made the eventual progress in this area difficult. A secondary aspect, but not a minor one, is the aforementioned lack of interest in translating Brandi's works into other languages, particularly English.

If we consider that a reassessment of Brandi's thought is worthwhile, it is because reviewing and updating his theory seems feasible and productive. Brandi's ontological interest in defining art, and architecture as art, deserves to be stimulated. Such a revision would merge his theory with aspects that Brandi may have left unexplored, and that go beyond the artistic condition in architecture, as suggested below.

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<sup>13</sup> Original quotation: "rappresenta invece un rigido accentramento e livellamento della storia per cui viene data un'unica chiave".

<sup>14</sup> Original quotation: "La sua elaborazione, espressa principalmente nell'Eliante e in Struttura e architettura era fondata su una latente consapevolezza che l'architettura fosse un fenomeno composto di aspetti organici e razionali allo stesso tempo. Brandi quindi rifiuta la opposizione funzionalismo-organicismo e dichiara per l'architettura l'impossibilità "di essere soltanto funzionale, senza negare se stessa come architettura e ridursi ad una passività costruttiva".

### Legacy, critique and reassessment

In the midst of the controversies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more evolved theoretical models emerged on heritage conservation. However, Brandi did not perceive progress in conservation until the arrival of Camillo Boito, who influenced the *Carta del restauro* of 1931 (Brandi, 2005: 185). Italian scholars represented the vanguard of the theoretical proposals, not only supporting the praxis, but also explaining restoration in a theoretical manner. Characters such as Luca Beltrami, Giacomo Boni, Gaetano Moretti and Gustavo Giovannoni all contributed with their approaches to conservation theory (Jokilehto, 1986: 329-56).

If we consider that heritage conservation must be considered as a social construction, therefore it is not difficult to conceive a negotiation between tradition and current perspectives, between individual and collective conceptions of the world. In this sense, Brandi's theory has often been used as a frame of reference for the protection of heritage. His influence has been significant in conservation charters, especially in Italy, and in the configuration of conservation approaches in the West, particularly in the cultures of Romance languages. Despite Brandi's insistence on a case-by-case approach to conservation, his theory, centered on aesthetics, runs the risk of being misunderstood if it is applied outside of the appropriate theoretical framework of phenomenology. Nowadays, the most progressive and socially inclusive tendencies, which consider ethnic-anthropological and material culture issues, together with aesthetic values, constitute a positive change in the awareness of cultural diversity. We hold here that the integration of phenomenological perspectives still constitutes a methodological enrichment and not a loss.

With the destructions of World War II as context, Brandi wrote in his *Elizante* that:

*We are facing an unfortunate tabula rasa which Europe has become and we are anxious to rebuild a Europe more European than ever. With this expectation we feel the duty of starting with the ideas* (Brandi, 1956: 118).<sup>15</sup>

Being responsible for the reconstruction after the war, which revealed his concern for identity, Brandi consolidated the central ideas of his later theory (Brandi, 1995: XI-XVIII). Along with his rigorous aesthetic phenomenological analysis of architecture, Brandi subtly suggested a more inclusive notion of conservation. He considered the environment as a general element within which architecture could be conserved (Brandi, 2005: 67). However, in his *Teoria del restauro*, he did not consider architecture to be, rather than an object of aesthetic perception and a source of historical knowledge, the existential dwelling of the human being. Given his reference to existentialist philosophers such as Sartre or Heidegger in his *Teoria generale della critica*, a phenomenological approach more fundamentally linked to a notion of architecture could be expected as the authentic place for human life.

Brandi was aware of the social importance of conserving cultural heritage or a place as a testimony of human history (Brandi, 1995: 14). His substantial participation in institutions such as the *Istituto Centrale del Restauro* and his academic activities confirm this concern. However, something that remained absent from his *Teoria del restauro* was the inclusion of a human existential dimension within architectural conservation. Within the social context, he distinguished between the notion of monument as a work of art and monumental as an ensemble. The first is based entirely on his aesthetic theory, while the second seems vaguely identified as art, but more as an environment with values anchored to the local culture.

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<sup>15</sup> Original quotation: "ci troviamo di fronte a questa disgraziata tabula rasa che è divenuta l'Europa, e che ardiamo dal desiderio di ricostruirla più europea che mai, nell'attesa sentiamo di dovere incominciare dalle idee".

For Brandi, art was the main value to be protected in his approach to conservation and, therefore, the peak of culture. He gave more importance to art from two points of view: aesthetic and historical. It was his concern for the *astanza* that gave art the privilege of being the most important human creation. Existentialist influences seem to play an important role in his more sophisticated aesthetic thinking. However, his theory did not propose ways of interpretation conducive to the protection of human habitation different or independent of this artistic epiphany, apart from criticism and restoration. However, Brandi pointed to a moral dimension for conservation, which would suggest that other dimensions of the discernment of architecture could be possible, fusing objective and existential reality with the timeless presence of his concept of *astanza*.

Scholars in Italy with renewed interest in Brandi's thinking have discussed his legacy in recent years. Symposia, conferences and congresses have been organized, not only as a tribute to his work, but also as opportunities to further develop, as well as to delve deeper into of his theoretical explanations. Some of the results of these meetings have been published in significant works (Brandi, 2005; Carboni, 1992; D'Angelo, 2006a; Prestinzenza, 1998; Russo, 2006). Other scholars have continued with those developments by taking into consideration Brandi's integrated theoretical texts as foundations for good practices in the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage. Among other examples, Giovanni Carbonara has undertaken a thorough study of Brandi's writings regarding his interpretation of architecture as an image (Carbonara, 1996), as well as the book edited by Antonella Cangelosi and Maria Rosaria Vitale (Cangelosi, 2008) as a result of a colloquium in Syracuse in 2006, where contemporary scholars approached Brandi's legacy from various points of view.

Brandi struggled for a philosophical reflection in the form of criticism through reason. Based on the knowledge thus developed, his theory and practice were consistent. Between existentialist and Marxist approaches, he chose the former as the one that offered an open potential for art. His philosophy was not lacking in inconsistencies, gaps and criticism; however, it still suggests possibilities for reflection and, probably as important nowadays as in his time, potential support for coherent treatments. Based mainly on Heidegger and Husserl, he integrated the phenomenological exploration of the human being, with the criticism of art and architecture. Thus, one of the consequences of this choice was his philosophical attitude towards heritage conservation, which includes the specific temporality in relation to the work of art in its creation and in its reception. His approach was characterized by the emergence from an object to its perception and awareness, rather than its metastructural effects. He was therefore more interested in distinguishing the *noetic* (that which signifies) from the *noematic* (the significant), leaving the contextual consequences of art to the discipline of art history.

## Conclusions

This article outlines Brandi's theoretical path in his approach to the discernment of art in general and architecture in particular, centered around his *Teoria del restauro*. Like others of his generation, the theoretical corpus developed by Brandi surpasses Croce's idealism that preceded him. The opposition between the concepts of intuition and expression was a constant in his thinking, not only as a reaction to idealistic concepts, but also against the semiotic tendencies of the time. Thus, the integration of recent phenomenological approaches to the study of art and architecture since art characterized his overcoming of idealism. Through a phenomenological *epoché*, Brandi deduced the essence of the artistic phenomenon without considering other realities that are integrated to that essence. He approached architecture phenomenologically within the framework of Kantian schematism. In architecture as in the

other arts, fragrance and *astanza* were revealed to him as two dimensions, which in architecture imply specific consequences in relation to human temporality. As we have suggested, Brandi's approach was phenomenological in its method and ontological in its objectives. This seemed to dissociate his philosophy from the tendencies of critical theory and to link it more to neo-Kantianism and phenomenology.

However, the ontological undertaking was and is relevant for scholars who investigate human existence with different approaches. The fact that architecture constitutes an important part of the human place, and its artistic condition, raises the question of what constitutes human inhabitation. Art, for Brandi, is the privileged manifestation of the *astanza*. However, Brandi defines *astanza* as a timeless presence. Therefore, architecture survives trapped in the middle, between a role as a necessarily dynamic and changing place of human habitation and a no less significant one of being, eventually, the material substrate of timeless works of art. Thus, confronting architectural conservation also means confronting human temporality, so by developing Brandi's *Teoria del restauro* by tuning its phenomenological premises with the conditions of human existence would allow his thought to find a renewed relevance.

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