AUTHENTICITY LOSS OF WALL-PAINTING HERITAGE: AN EVER EXPANDING CASELOAD

Dan Mohanu, Cristina Serendan*

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Abstract: The attempt, for a few decades since establishing the modern principles of heritage protection, to maintain the authenticity criterion as decisive for the preservation and restoration process of a work of art in its vastest meaning, had to face one of the most controversial and at the same time vital issues for the artwork's reception: the issue of emerging lacunae in the field of the image. In order to understand what was gained and what was lost in the few decade-long Romanian experience of artwork restoration related to the authenticity criterion, the authors elaborate a comment on the theory of Cesare Brandi, whom we owe the modern methodology for reintegration of the image lacunae.

Rezumat: Încercarea, vreme de câteva decenii de la fundamentarea principiilor moderne ale protecţiei patrimoniului, de a menţine criteriul autenticităţii ca decisiv pentru procesul conservării şi restaurării operei de artă, în înţelesul ei cel mai vast, a avut de înfruntat una din problemele cele mai controversate şi în acelaşi timp vitale pentru receptarea operei: problema apariţiei lacunelor în câmpul imaginii. Pentru a înţelege însă ce s-a câştigat şi ce s-a pierdut în experienţa românească de câteva decenii a restaurării operei de artă în raport cu criteriul autenticităţii autorii realizează un comentariu al teoriei lui Cesare Brandi căruia i se datorează metodologia modernă de reintegrare a lacunelor imaginii.

By its emerging in the 19th century and then its establishment and consolidation during the entire 20th Century, the modern protection of heritage seemed to have acquired a certain doctrinary stability. The expansion, nuancing or enrichment of documents regarding the vast domain of the legacy of civilisations seemed to have a solid and definitively implanted axis with the advent of what was called the Venice Charter. Based on Brandian Restoration Theory, which has been put together as a stringent necessity in Italy in the 1960s, the Venice Charter established key reference points for interventions on architectural heritage which, at that time, seamed to be indestructibile. The nourishing substance, which made the fundamental principles of heritage protection remain viable worldwide for decades, lies in the fulgurant Theory of Restoration which Cesare Brandi wrote driven by urgency.[1]

The viability of Brandi's theory lies, in our opinion, in constructing a veritable thinking mechanism that determines the intervention on the artwork, and which should lead, no matter the angle, to the *restitutio* of an authentic, readable work, maintaining its original material unaltered, together with the traces of time. We are dealing with an intervention resulting from the principle: *the artwork conditions the restoration, not the other way around*.[2]

For a few decades since establishing the modern principles of cultural heritage protection, the attempt to maintain the principle of authenticity as decisive criterion in the process of conservation and restoration of an artwork in its vastest meaning, had to face one of the most controversial and at the same time vital issue for the artwork's perception: the issue of emerging lacunae in the field of the image. We might say that, for public awareness, the discontinuities and mutilations caused by lacunae prevail over real conservation issues, barely visible to the untrained eye. A restoration that leaves behind a work where nothing seems to have happened, where the restorer does not show the virtues of reconstruction and creativity, is not a convincing one, but a rather more vulnerable subject of public contempt than the abusive remodelling of the work's authentic substance.

*   *Dan Mohanu*, National University of Arts, Bucharest, e-mail: dan_ileana_m@yahoo.com; *Cristina Serendan*, National University of Arts, Bucharest, e-mail: cserendan@yahoo.com.

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1   Brandi 1977, p. VII. In his *Foreword* Brandi explains the necessity of the second edition: "*Esauritasi ormai l'edizione, ma non la funzione, essendo anzi accresciuta in tutto il mondo l'attività di restauro, ma non altrettanto migliorata, per la formazione di restauratori e di critici d'arte, che alle opere d'arte debbano provvedere, una ristampa era richiesta e vi ha provveduto l'editore Einaudi, nel quadro della pubblicazione delle mie opere*" ("The restoration activity was developing all over the world without also producing, to the extent of this expansion, an improvement in the training of restorers and critics who were to take care of the work of art").
2   *Ibidem*, p. 5 "*l'opera d'arte condiziona il restauro e non già l'opposto*".

Fig. 1. Crişcior, church founded by Duke Bălea in late 14th Century. Detail of votive picture.

Fig. 2. Wall painting inside the rock-hewn church at Corbii de Piatră, Argeş County (14th Century). Detail from the scene of *The Resurrection of Lazarus*.

However, to understand what was gained and what was lost during decades of Romanian experience in the restoration of artworks related to the criterion of authenticity, a critical judgement and analysis of the main reference points of Brandi's theory is required, which generated his methodology for reintegration of losses.

The first topic of the comment regards the status and typology of lacunae as subject of image restitution methodology in the restoration process. Brandi resorts to the arsenal of the psychology of shape and to the philological argument to extract the methodology of lacunae reintegration from under the incidence of the arbitrary or opinionated.

The lacuna is a discontinuity in the image seen as a "text", constituting itself at the same time as a *shape* projected on the image that has become its *background* (Fig. 1).[3] The fragment status of an image-"text" renders the lacunae differentiated responsibilities in the image lecture. Hence the possibilities and limitations regarding the remake of the image reading.

The permissiveness of regaining the continuity of the image-"text" depends on one hand on the size of the lacunae, and on the other on the place they take in the "sentence" syntax. Hence the status of reconstructable or not reconstructable lacunae, re-integrationable or not re-integrationable lacunae.

The extent of the lacuna is the first to impose the limits up to which, in the absence of any other documents than the living work, we are allowed to remake the continuity of the image-"text" without committing, as Brandi puts it, forgery, both aesthetically and historically.[4] In this case we deal with the sometimes catastrophic dimensions of lacunae, which leave no room even for the most documented hypotheses or analogies.

The position of the lacuna within the "context" is, in its turn, decisive for our possibility to re-establish the lost unity of the image. This time, not the extent of destruction is decisive, but its position in key-places such as faces, non-repetitive details of garments, inscriptions, etc. (Fig. 2). On the other hand, lacunae equivalent in size can take up perfectly reconstructable places within the "text" of the image, e.g. the

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[3]   Brandi 1977, p. 18. "*La lacuna, pur con una conformazione fortuita, si pone come figura rispetto ad un fondo che allora viene a essere rappresentato dal dipinto*" ("Having a contingent configuration, the lacuna emerges as a *figure* on a *background*, background that actually is the painting itself").

[4]   *Ibidem*, p. 8. It is the condition included in the second principle of restoration, formulated by Brandi: "*Il restauro deve mirare al ristabilimento della unità potenziale dell'opera d'arte, purché ciò sia possibile senza commettere un falso artistico o un falso storico, e senza cancellare ogni traccia del passaggio dell'opera d'arte nell tempo.*" ("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.").

"impersonal" surface of backgrounds, repetitive ornamental areas or geometric tracks, the reconstitution of which leaves no doubt whatsoever.

Most of the times, the two evaluation criteria of lacunae, extent and positioning, work together and generate a resultant where the destiny of heritage depends on the prevalence of the authentic over circumstantial festivist interests, which promote the arbitrary of *ex novo* reconstructions.

An eloquent example for what means the simultaneous presence of lacunae with different typologies is the recently discovered votive picture on the South wall of the cave church at Corbii de Piatră (Argeş County).[5] Below the niche arch in the central area of the wall, Jesus Immanuel, blessing with both hands, stands above the votive figure in the image axis, while two other figures are painted, at a smaller scale, on either side of the main figure. It looks like a ruler's figure, flanked by the image of his two sons, from which we can hardly distinguish small fragments. From the frontal representation of the main figure we can still read the hair's outline, the ears, a small fragment of the nose and mouth line, the lateral starting lines of the beard. The head's upper part, where a crown or diadem could have been painted, is crossed by a lacuna. The lower area of the picture is lost completely, uncovering the sandstone support of the wall painting (Fig. 3). We are dealing therefore with an extended lacuna, conjugated with lacunae of smaller or larger sizes placed in key area of the faces. In both hypostases, reconstructing the image by analogy implies an overwhelming degree of hypothesis, which, in Brandi's opinion, excludes any attempt to reconstitute.[6]

The instance within which Brandi develops his theory on the reintegration of image lacunae is the one regarding the aesthetics of shape. Along his fundamental text dedicated to restoration, the issue of visual perception, of philosophy of shape, returns every time as a foundation of the methodology regarding the treatment of discontinuities caused by lacunae. At the same time, the restoration intervention is legitimate only in the case of identifying the heritage object as a work of art. Acknowledging the artwork, extracted from the sphere of other human activities, seeing it with its unique and unrepeatable nature, is the first condition for initiating the restoration process.[7] Therefore, regarded from the territory of the artwork, the lacuna turns not only into a lineal interruption in the text, but also into a dynamic element in the image space: an emerging shape which imposes itself in the foreground of the scene, a presence projected on the artwork, thus turned into a background.[8]

Therefore, not only a fragmentation of the "text"-image occurs, but also a global disturbance of the artwork's perception as a whole. The connotations can be numerous, from psychological discomfort to parasitizing the image's theological mission.[9]

To the aggressiveness of lacunae, the monolithic unity of the artwork is opposed, its capacity to survive not as a totality of pieces indifferent to each other, but as a whole which keeps for a long time, until the last state of ruin, its initial identity. Brandi says that, although "physically shattered", the artwork continues to subsist through each of its parts.[10] In other words, the fragment of the work, like a living being, contains the *potential whole*. This potentiality is the vital support, like some kind of renewable energy resource, for the existence and survival of the artwork. At the same time, it is the necessary support for the reintegration of lacunae.

In the process of safeguarding the cultural heritage authenticity, another aspect must be exposed and unequivocally defined: the issue of forgery. It is strictly related to our topic, to the process of reconstituting the image continuity and remaking the potential unity of the artwork. What is, actually, the status of the restored work related to its initial state? To what extent does the restored work offer the guarantee of authenticity after the preservation treatment?

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5   Mohanu (ed.) 2010, pp. 49-53.
6   Brandi 1977, p. 74. "*Con talle atteggiamento noi dobbiamo limitarci a favorfire il godimento di quell che resta e si presenta a noi dell'opera d'arte, senza integrazioni analogiche, in modo che non possa nascere il dubbio sulla autenticitá di una parte qualsiasi dell'opera d'arte stessa.*" ("Through such an attitude we limit ourselves to facilitate the appreciation of what is left of the artwork, avoiding integrations by analogy, so that no doubts whatsoever arise regarding the authenticity of any part of the artwork.").
7   *Ibidem*, pp. 3-6.
8   *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.
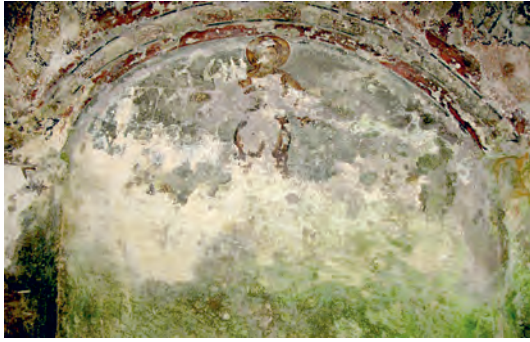9   Palade 2005, p. 172.
10 Brandi 1977, p. 16.

Fig. 3. The rock-hewn church at Corbii de Piatră. Niche in the south wall containing fragments from the votive picture.

Fig. 4. Sf. Voievozi (Holy Great Sovereigns) Church in Piscani, Argeş County (late 18th – early 19th Century). View on the *Doomsday* in the porch, incisively repainted on occasion of the most recent restoration of the wall painting ensemble.

Fig. 5. Doamnei Church in Bucharest (1683), founded by Maria Doamna, the wife of Prince Şerban Cantacuzino and decorated with frescoes by Constantinos and Ioan. Detail from the *Tent of Witness* after the reintegration of lacunae in *velatura* technique.

Especially the experience of the past two decades revealed the face of communities extremely attached to what Riegl called the "present-day value" to the detriment of the "age value".[11] An excessive sympathy for all that has a fresh scent, an aseptic look, the glamour, pomp, stridence and pragmatism of the new constructions, of relentless renovations achieved even with surrogates is ever more visible than for the decrepit, romantic aspect, undissimulated in the anatomy and matter it is composed of, expressed in proportions and colours of obsolete nobility, preserved by the survivors of a heritage still untouched by the claw of contemporary rehabilitations. The result of such a conflict is a progressive silent adoption of forgery through restoration (Fig. 4), using methodologies that have always observed the criteria of forgery: replacing the authentic substance of the work, often with a surrogate; replacing the original with a new face, the faker the more convincing it is in its technique and discourse; a systematic deletion of the original's marks of its passage through time; the unrecognisable, undifferentiated character of the intervention as compared to the original.[12]

To sum up the comment above, we can set those few reference points that led to building an adequate methodology to reintegrate lacunae in the spirit of maintaining the work's authenticity:

- regarding the image as a "text", the lecture discontinuity caused by lacunae can be evaluated by simultaneously taking into account two compl-ementary criteria: extent and positioning of lacunae;

- the aesthetic instance reveals the lacunae hypostasis from the perspective of shape psychology: the lacuna may disturb the work's lecture by its presence as a shape projected on the image thus turned into a background;

- acknowledged as an artwork, the heritage object benefits from the subsistence, to a larger or smaller extent, of the whole in each of its fragments;

- the act of restoration, where the operations for reintegration of lacunae also fall, is confronted with a major issue: forgery.

Brandi's theory, eventually sublimated in a normative act, the Restoration Charter,[13] underlay a methodology for handling lacunae based on both observing the artwork's original substance and regaining its potential unity as much as possible. Through reintegration operations of lacunae, the reading of the image becomes clearer and the state in which the

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[11]   Riegl 1984, p. 88.
[12]   Mohanu 2012, pp. 56-59.
[13]   Brandi 1977, pp. 133-154.

work has reached us is maintained visible, also maintaining the differentiated character of the intervention compared to the original.

The two reintegration methods of lacunae in wall paintings,[14] *velatura* for attenuating discontinuities and disturbances caused by flaking and erosions of the paint layer (Fig. 5) and *tratteggio* for deep lacunae (support together with the paint layer), which allow the distinctive reconstruction of the picture continuity (Fig. 6), have already been used for more than half a century. Their viability must be evaluated not so much through the pragmatism of a compatible technique, as through the logic and appropriate judgement that justifies their applicability. Therefore, what is of interest to us in the last instance is the viability of the adopted principle, of reintegration differentiated from the original, and less the texture type through which Brandi succeeded for the first time to regain the image continuity, interrupted by lacunae.[15] Of course, the practical side of progressive image reconstruction by using the optical mix of the small coloured lines which make up the original colour has its applicative value without becoming an exclusive means, as is often believed. Likewise, we must be reminded that the artwork – the colouring, the surface texture, its degree of wear etc. – determines the method for the reintegration of losses (Fig. 7). A critical evaluation, of all aspects of the existence of the restoration object, is the one which decides how far and in which way the issue of lacunae can be handled without the risk of forgery.

All these precautions governed by the principle of authenticity, created a supple, non-dogmatic system for reintegrating of lacunae, a system of no pre-established recipes, reversible, in which the possibilities and limitations of restoration interventions are equally evaluated.

The possibilities are generated by the fact that, as one of the Brandi's statements reads, the "artwork, as it is not composed of parts, if physically shattered, will necessarily continue to potentially subsist as a *whole* through each of its fragments".[16] Up to a certain point of destruction, the reconstruction can be done without committing forgery, with respect to its double hypostasis as an artwork – unique and unrepeatable – and as a document of a civilisation.

Fig. 6. Using *tratteggio* for a distinctive reintegration of the reconstructible lacunae.

Fig. 7. Fragment of wall painting detached from the Great Church of the former Văcăreşti Monastery. Detail from the scene *The Birth of Jesus* after pictorial reintegration in *velatura* technique.

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[14] Mora, Mora, Philippot 1986, pp. 293-305.
[15] Giantomassi 2006, pp. 295-298. The historic restoration of the Mazzatosta Chapel in Viterbo was the place where Brandi developed his system of distinctive remake of the image continuity by using the *tratteggio* technique for the first time.
[16] Brandi 1977, p. 16. "…*l'opera d'arte, non constando di parti, se fisicamente frantumata, dovrà continuare a sussistere potenzialmente come un tutto in ciascuno dei suoi frammenti…*".

Fig. 8. Hammered area in the sanctuary of Doamnei Church in Bucharest. Reintegration of lacunae is done by mortar fillings similar in texture with the original *arriccio,* kept under the level of the paint layer.

Fig. 9. Cozia Monastery, wall paintings on the West arch and tympanum of the oratory (early 18th Century) by archimandrite Ioan of Hurezi, after the most recent restoration and the repainting of the large lacunar areas.

The limits in the reintegration of lacunae are imposed by the emergence of the hypothesis in the process of image reconstruction. It is the moment when, leaving more or less openly the territory of restoration, we enter the slippery ground of forgery. Cesare Brandi's answer to the dilemma caused by the existence of non-reconstructable lacunae was to set up a methodology based, in its turn, on the psychology of perception. The premise was to maintain the fragments subsisting from the original in the perception foreground and to lower the lacuna surface to the background.[17] The apparently simple solution, but which requires a careful preliminary examination of the original stratigraphy, of the mural character of the layers, starting from the masonry base layer, is to present the nonreconstructable lacunae under the level of the original paint layers by using the specific texture of an underlayer (*arriccio*) (Fig. 8) or even by maintaining the masonry visible.

Brandi's methodology for the reintegration of losses received a legislative character in our country during the former Direction for Historic Monuments, chaired by Professor Vasile Drăguț, during the training of the first nucleus of wall painting restorers and the initiation of the Romanian restorers' participation in the ICCROM courses in Rome.

The interventions for reintegration of losses have been for a long time subject to a number of restrictions in the name of preserving the heritage authenticity, especially in those cases of emergency interventions related to the strict preservation of endangered wall paintings or of the stratigraphic research of layers hidden underneath plasters or overpaintings. An imposed austerity, showing an infinitely greater respect than that we are cultivating for the legacy of the past today.

The dissolution of the Direction for Historic Monuments in 1977 meant the beginning of a gradual decline of the principles carefully built in the course of only a few years. A constant *glissando* occurred from the initial precautions of pure conservation, accompanied by a subtle aesthetics dedicated to save the authentic image, to the instauration of incisive pictorial reintegration, of abusive overpainting under the sign of the arbitrary (Fig. 9).

Disclosing the expansion of this phenomenon seems even more urgent as the authenticity loss of valuable wall painting ensembles has long surpassed the status of an accidental event, turning into a malady, systematically extended to categories of historic monuments and geographical areas. We must say that the

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[17] *Ibidem*, p. 19: "…*facendo in modo che la lacuna da figura a cui il dipinto fa da fondo, funzioni da fondo su cui il dipinto é figura.*" ("…working in such a way that the lacuna will not act as a *figure* to which the painting serves as background, but as a background on which the painting is the figure"). See also Mora, Mora, Philippot 1986, pp. 301-302.

mural ensembles we refer to in the present paper almost entirely belong to religious monuments and the phenomenon we point out stands, apparently, in flagrant contradiction with the fervour of religious life in our country, with the existence of a living heritage, of communities of believers who love acts of devotion and founding gestures.

Building up the nucleus of wall painting restorers by Vasile Drăguț in the early 1970s was similar, at due proportions, to the mission the Central Institute for Restoration (*Istituto Centrale del Restauro*) in Rome had. The gesture not only responded to the requirements of the Direction for Historic Monuments related to the multidisciplinary and scientific character of its activity, but also to the need of taking wall painting restoration from under the incidence of the empirical and arbitrary, and of the risk to be carried out with no control by artisan-artists, as Argan or Brandi would have put it.[18]

The beginnings of that group of wall painting restorers trained by Drăguț were based on the principle of the minimal intervention, in a working system where urgent consolidation operations, stratigraphic investigations, recoveries of ensembles from under overpaintings, plasters or whitewash were prevalent. Cleaning operations, carried out with every precaution in the crypt room and sanctuary of the church of Humor Monastery, were doubled by the emergency consolidation intervention for the flaking paint layers in the porch. A true "emergency policy" was accompanied by an unprecedented concern for detecting and analysing the processes of decay, for converting restoration into a multidisciplinary activity where preventive conservation plays a decisive role. In less than a decade, *la jeune equipe*, as the Romanian restorer group was to be called during the first international colloquy dedicated to wall painting, organised in Suceava in 1977,[19] on the eve of the suppression of the Direction for Historic Monuments, succeeded in creating an intervention methodology dedicated to the entire country. During all this time, the issue of pictorial reintegration of lacunae was deliberately missing from the methodological range of the restorers' group. The urgency and purpose of interventions with a conservative character imposed a certain austerity of the gestures with aesthetic character. This decision, silently adopted, without being stated in the context of any programme, was first of all a common sense attitude toward the scope of decay of a vast and diversified wall painting heritage.

During this time, the experiences related to the aesthetic handling of lacunae did not cease to exist, backed by an entire history, synchronous to what was happening in Europe and significant for our own history of restoration. The key example, pertaining to the reaction against the method introduced by the French architect Lecomte du Noüy, remains the restoration of the wall paintings in the Sf. Nicolae Domnesc Church (the Princely Church of St Nicholas) in Curtea de Argeș.[20] The interwar experience, coordinated by the Commission for Historic Monuments, was followed by a reassessment – even if empirical and lacking a critical analysis – of the reintegration methods in the case of wall painting lacunae, especially after the first systematic contacts with the ICCROM School in Rome.[21] The clarifications regarding the use of the *tratteggio* and *velatura* methods were accompanied by valuable local solutions regarding the aesthetic presentation of wall paintings. The most significant example in our opinion, where the austerity of the means comes to support a subtle and rigorous restitution of the authentic image, is the restoration of the wall paintings inside the hospital chapel at Cozia Monastery. Professor Constantin Blendea offered a lesson regarding the way lacunae can be handled with a minimum of means, a method that protected one of the most beautiful iconographic ensembles in 16th-century Walachia. Unfortunately, it was a restoration model that had too few consequences and was especially counterbalanced by the uncritical, vulgarised adaptation of Brandi's method for image reconstruction. The entire system of lacunae reintegration, based on a rigorous analysis and the respect for authenticity, was turned into a justifying method for abusive reconstructions. In artisan versions, more or less true to the original version of

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[18] Related to the programme of the Central Institute for Restoration (ICR) in Rome, Argan pointed out: "we decide to promote transposing the restoration from the artistic-artisans' level to the scientific one". Serio 2006, p. 14.
[19] Colloque Suceava 1977.
[20] See the issue dedicated to the archaeological research and restoration works at the Ruler's Court in Curtea de Argeș by the journal BCMI 1917-1923.
[21]   Mora, Mora, Philippot 1986, preface by Professor Vasile Drăguț, pp. 9-11.

Fig. 10. Cozia Monastery, oratory of archimandrite Ioan. Ensemble of wall paintings on the south wall of the nave after the most recent restoration – repainting.

Fig. 11. Văcăreşti Monastery. Detail of the detached wall painting fragment representing the Birth of Jesus, after the reintegration of the lacunae in the paint layer.

operations, the *tratteggio* and *velatura* methods were attributed to ample hypothetic reconstitutions (Fig. 10) of debatable quality or to incisive repaintings. The results were definitively compromised ensembles, located outside any possibility to be subject to an authentic stylistic and iconographic lecture.

In the following, our comment will attempt to characterise the methodological errors related to reintegrating the lacunae of wall paintings, errors practised and always revitalised, being the basis of the constant loss of authenticity in a heritage as vast as it is defenceless.

1. A first error comes from the inappropriate use of the *velatura* method, even up to abuse. As the word itself defines it, the lacunae in the painting coat are covered with a fine "veil", transparent *par excellence*, made up of the local shade and the natural aging layer or *patina* which the wall painting has irreversibly acquired over time. It is easy to understand that this subtle "veiling", made up through a scholarly and patient overlapping of shades, reaching the performances of a *sfumatura*, does not annihilate the lacunae in the paint layer, but progressively attenuates their presence by rendering the possibility to mentally restore the lost integrity of the image (Fig. 11), according to the degree of destruction for each area.

Of course, this method is far from the retouching carried out shade-in-shade or from what the restorers call an "illusionist retouch", wanting to highlight the character of the intervention.

The genuine *velatura* is carried out in a stratigraphic vision, starting from the ground shades of the painting coat to the fine "wear" integration that regards the successive erosion of the coat overlappings, from the patina, irreversibly fixed in the surface, to the transparent shades and those representing the finishing of the image.[22]

One of the current errors was that of quickly obtaining a "unity" of the image without taking into account its style features, the initial modelling which can be inferred through an attentive lecture of the surviving details. Carried out flatly, often in shades more intense than the original or in non-accordance with it, the so-called *velatura* has led to a decorative character of the image, actually introducing it into a different stylistic category. In this operation, a special part was played by retracing the outlines, which became equal and inexpressive, lacking the plasticity of the spontaneous and nuanced duct of the original. The final result is a stylistically uncertain image, with an aspect that is confusing when viewed from a distance and unbearable for the person who tries to study or to take pictures in detail.

In this first stage of forgery, the progress was the passing from the flat shade applied in the lacuna to the shaping initiative through which not only the outlines, the track of which was visible, were brought back to the intensity considered to be the initial one, but also certain details that were missing from the image's

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[22]   *Ibidem,* pp. 297-298.

"writing". Starting from here, the local pietism, supported by the client's persuasion, by the restorer's incompetence, weakness or irresponsibility, cleared the way for arbitrary reconstructions through which both the *velatura* method and the original image lost their identity (Figs. 12, 13).

    2. The spectacular of errors in reintegration operations for lacunae was reached by an uncritical and unprofessional application of the *tratteggio* method.

    Paolo and Laura Mora describe in detail the role of the method in the reintegration process and how it can be technically achieved.[23] Few of the Romanian restorers who applied the method along several decades found out, however, that this remake system of the image continuity in a differentiated texture from the original is due to Cesare Brandi and is subject to technical rigors and restrictions. The distinctive character of the intervention does not exempt one from the responsibility of observing the authenticity, from mandatorily avoiding any hypothetical addition, obtained through analogy or simply made up. The decision to reintegrate by *tratteggio* is conditioned by the certainty regarding the regaining of the image continuity, based on evaluating the lacuna positioning and extent and on the existence of eloquent documentation. To differentiate the intervention from the original has the role of enabling the beholder to coherently read the image without producing the illusion of its integrity and thus creating a forgery. The optical mix of the lines that compose the texture of the surface reintegrated in *tratteggio* makes that, from a certain distance, the perception of the image continuity works, while the particular texture of the reintegration method provides an easy distinction of the infilled areas from the painted surroundings. Thus, we can find out how much of the original subsists and eliminate the risk of speculative stylistic appreciations.

    In Romania, the faulty use of *tratteggio* generated results the morphology of which is an expression of getting constantly farther away from the principle of authenticity. From timid compromises, in respectful formulae that still show a remaining attachment to the original, it has got to arbitrary reformulations of the authentic image (Fig. 14).

    One of the errors committed in the name of respect for the original is the reintegration of lacunae through the *flou* method. In absence of all the key points required in order to regain the continuity of images fragmented by lacunae, the adopted solution was to create an imprecise image, as if the details were regarded through

Fig. 12. Church founded by the Cândea clan in Râu de Mori. The wall paintings (of the 15th Century), fragmentarily preserved, were subject to extensive repainting which led in the end to an irremediable loss of authenticity.

Fig. 13. The Old Church of Râmeț Monastery (14th Century). Detail from the wall paintings due to the 18th Century reconstruction. The pictorial reintegrations carried out during the last restoration project make any stylistic appreciation difficult.

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[23] *Ibidem,* pp. 298-299 and 300-301.

Fig. 14. Râmeț. Example of arbitrary reconstruction of the image in *tratteggio*, based on analogy.

Fig. 15. Râmeț. Example of reintegration in *tratteggio*, using the hypothetical reconstitution of the large lacunae in an abusive way.

thick fog, thus attempting to express a cautious reconstruction, where only the large shapes become visible. Aesthetically speaking, the area reintegrated in *flou* often imposes itself on the beholder more than the net image, thus parasiting the perception of the original, exactly through the imprecise shape the eye is trying to decipher in the fog that surrounds it. Even though the method may work in certain cases – e.g. eroded surfaces – it remains the source of errors in reintegrating lacunae.

The decisive deviation from observing authenticity is, however, the use of *tratteggio* for arbitrary reconstitutions where the analogy and the creative "virtues" of the restorer meet. It is a category of "fully licensed" forgery, agreed upon by the wish and uncensored taste of the beneficiary, resulting from the idiosyncrasy toward the image which irreversibly bears the marks of passing through time. To this, the pressure of an inflexible iconism is added, incapable to accept and coexist with the image preserved as a fragment; insensitive to the "ancient air" that heritage carries. What has survived of the original image, sometimes of priceless value, is subordinated to a falsified vision that the reconstruction imposes more or less convincingly. In this case, the presence of the particular texture of the *tratteggio* is just a pretext for covering up analogous, hypothetical remakes, or those resulting from the creative propensity of the restorer (Fig. 15).

All hypostases presented above can also have a technical deviation in common. Not knowing the manner in which the *tratteggio* is applied in practice led to uselessly textured surfaces, as long as the reintegrated lacunae operate as arbitrary additions, visibly located outside the original. Carried out in a texture where perhaps only the graphic quality works, but not the chromatic one resulting from the optic mix of lines, made without the necessary accuracy, the pseudo-method of reintegration in "*tratteggio*" becomes a decay source for the authentic image.

3. The extreme form of suppressing any trace of authenticity in final aesthetic presentation of wall paintings is the more or less extended use of the "illusionistic" retouch or even total overpainting, shade over shade. The original is concealed under a new pictorial layer (Fig. 16), sometimes under difficult reversibility conditions. Any stylistic evaluation becomes impossible and, at the same time, the iconographical reading becomes doubtful. The attribute of "restoration", still granted to such an irremediably destroyed painting ensemble, is nothing else than a synthesis between the craft of the person who executed the works and the client's taste. Generally, in such cases the preference of uneducated communities for the already mentioned "newness value" works for *ex novo* restitutions of the image, for suppressing the authentic, aged and worn wall surfaces and for their replacement with new, aseptic "epidermises".

Resorting to repainting, considered as a practice in the centuries that had not yet discovered the concept of heritage, indissolubly connected to that of authenticity, sees a concerning recrudescence today. This distress is mainly manifest in rural areas, in buildings founded by monks, small boyars and peasants in the 18th and 19th centuries (Fig. 17), mural ensembles which, on the medieval support layer, had made a living art bloom, of a freshness typical rather of a new beginning than of a fatigued and decadent end. Today, the owners themselves consider these foundations to be uncomfortable and expired "figures".

Fig. 16. Piscani (Argeș), Sf. Voievozi Church. Identity loss of the original wall paintings due to abusive and mutilating overpaintings.

Fig. 17. Sf. Îngeri (Holy Angels) Church in Romani, in the vicinity of Hurezi Monastery. Detail of the votive picture subject to a mutilating overpainting, as is the case of the entire painting ensemble.

The analysed phenomenon, which we would call, in conclusion, an *expansion of the authenticity loss of the heritage*, acquires its nourishing substance from the contradictory complexity of contemporary existence, which is defined by the following aspects:

    – absence of a stewardship capable to maintain an egalitarian and efficient control over heritage;

    – on the other hand, the revival of the founding act after 1989, under the conditions in which the relative autonomy of communities and the private initiative have grown;

    – a certain dynamism of the church life, centralised *par excellence*, with a visible growth of ecclesiastic authority in the domain of heritage management as compared to the secular authority, which is decentralised, inefficient and unstable;

    – a regression of heritage education by substituting the authenticity value, which imposes certain restrictions in the intervention on heritage and the way it is restituted, with the development value, implying the conservation and adaptation of heritage to the new economic and social demands that define contemporary existence;

    – legislative inefficiency both in formulating the normative acts related to the intervention on heritage and in applying standards capable to stop the forgery, mutilation or irreversible destruction of the legacy from the past.

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