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THE EFFECTS OF AESTHETIC HEDONISM IN PAINTING RESTORATION IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Abstract:

Aesthetics and philosophical measures are among the bases influential on artistic approaches of each era during art history. Although, rooted in Greek classic art, Aesthetics based on Hedonism boomed in 18th and again in the second half of 19th century. New concepts and definitions of aesthetic hedonism, presented then, along with philosophical trends were influential on aspects of arts. Hedonistic attitudes believing in beauty is in creation of pleasure were expanding. Such trends and attitudes were significantly effective on restorations performed on paintings in the 19th century when differences of opinions were prominent. This article is challenging to study the intellectual backgrounds of aesthetic hedonism in restorations on paintings during the said century and to indicate their direct and salient influence on such restorations. After explaining theories and presenting tangible examples, it expresses the proposed theories and endorses the influence of aesthetic hedonism on restoration on paintings during the 19th century.

Keywords:

Paintings Restoration, Aesthetic, Hedonism, 19th century Introduction

Introduction

During the 19th century, with the advent of new intellectual basis for restoration by two groups of rationalists¹ and anti-rationalists² and expressing their points of view in different fields of maintenance and restoration of monumental works, the attitudes and procedures resulted to painting restoration flourished.

Also in this century, the first of numerous books specifically on the restoration of paintings, Christian Köster's *Über Restaurierung Alter Ölgemälde*, was published in 1827. Previously, limited information on restoration had been available only in treatises on the art of painting.¹ These new writings argued the level to which cleaning should be taken and approaches to the compensation of losses. These issues were related respectively to a redefinition of patina in the nineteenth century² and to the rise of the field of connoisseurship. (Partridge, 2006)

On the other hand, the topmost conflict of views between rationalists and anti-rationalists in this century is quite noticeable. This confrontation indicates the victory of a group of thinkers in some decades and of course the victory of the other group in other decades. As an example, the scope of thoughts from the fundamental views of Eastlake³ group to the minimalistic concepts of Cavalcaselle⁴ demonstrates the degree

¹ Rationalism is the view that regards reason as the chief source and test of knowledge.

² The principle or habit of accepting reason as the supreme authority in matters of opinion, belief, or conduct.

³ Sir Charles Lock Eastlake (17 November 1793 – 24 December 1865) was an English painter, gallery director, collector and writer of the early 19th century. He was the first President of the National Gallery of London (1824).

⁴ Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle (22 January 1819 – 31 October 1897) was an Italian writer and art critic.

⁵ Immanuel Kant (Königsberg, 22 aprile 1724 – Königsberg, 12 febbraio 1804) was a German philosopher who is a central figure in modern philosophy.

⁶ Benedetto Croce (25 February 1866 – 20 November 1952) was an Italian idealist philosopher, historian and politician. He wrote on numerous topics, including philosophy, history, historiography and aesthetics.

of conflict in this century. Probably, no other period can be found in which such variety can be observed.

In the field of aesthetics concepts in the 19th century, advancement in expansion of thoughts of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant⁵ is noticeable which was then explained and completed by his disciples. But among these, the significant point is the definition of the concepts of this century presented by Benedetto Croce⁶, Italian philosopher and aesthetic in the 20th century. In defining art, in his book, *Breviari di Estetica*, he believes that considering art enjoyable is related to special point of views in certain eras of human life. He considers Aesthetics Hedonism a kind of Aesthetics which culminated in the second half of the 19th century and was seriously taken into consideration by philosophers and Aesthetics. They believed that art creates pleasure. The important point is that it seems the footprint of such aesthetic thinking is traceable in fundament of restoration of monuments, especially restoration of paintings. The challenge in this article is that in an analytic- descriptive ground, first the raised philosophical concepts description and expansion are mentioned and their historical process and development is fully studied, then begets logical relations between sources related to theoretical bases of paintings in one side and the concepts related to aesthetics and hedonism in another side. Finally turns to review the aesthetics viewpoints of Benedetto Corce in this field in the process of paintings restorations in the 19th century. In this respect, tangible examples of paintings restoration in the said century are used for a complete conformity of restoration with aesthetics concepts of Corce.

Hedonism history process

In order to study the historical background of the dominant thoughts in the 19th century, especially its second half, it is essential to analyze the romantic ideas created in this century. Croce considers a sort of aesthetics based on hedonism as dominant over the thoughts of this century and mentions in his book that the hedonistic concepts in the fields of art and aesthetics belong to some certain historical periods. He searches for the origin of these concepts in classical civilization of Greece and Rome and believes that their re-flourishing is related to the 18th century and the interest of philosophy novices in that era. Of course, he considers another rebirth in the second half of the 19th

century researchable. In order to comprehend it better, a short explanation about the functional process seems important.

Hedonism survey in Classic Greece

In Greece civilization in the fourth and the third centuries B.C., the most important philosophical questions had been answered by two prominent philosophy masters of the whole history, Aristotle⁷ and Plato⁸. So, the powerful and contemplative mind of the people in this land was ready for adaptation of philosophical concepts. On the other side and simultaneously, concepts based on hedonism started to form in the thinking domain of the Greeks. In such a situation, Epicurus⁹, who is considered to be the founder of Epicurean School, believed that the concepts of goodness and usefulness in philosophy field are similar to pleasure. According to his idea, moral and physical beauties are generally means for attaining the goal which is pleasure. The Epicureans show very well that the ancient discussions of topics pertinent to aesthetics are neither cursory nor undeveloped. The claim that Epicurus had made a distinct contribution to aesthetics might be a little surprising, because a number of sources report his critical views of certain approaches to art. (Celkyte, 2017). Epicurus presented guidelines for aesthetic based on hedonism or aesthetic appeal and in this respect introduced his aim enjoyability of secular desires such as visual and audible items. Actually, he put Plato's intellectual concept subject to question. After Epicurus, his followers and imitators, the most important one Phimodemus¹⁰, started to expand and perhaps in a way to adjust his thoughts. In poetry and music, Phimodemus believed in the existence of special relations between being useful and being enjoyable and based on his thoughts the unity of art and in a way a sort of aesthetic pleasure was proposed in Hellenic era.

The 18th century and Hedonistic thoughts formation

In this century, regarding the formation of rationalist thoughts and orderly, systematic approaches, new developments in philosophical insight appeared which could be considered as the aesthetic world of the 18th century and is the same hedonistic aesthetic. Among the most significant of philosophic concepts, and of course aesthetic ones, Immanuelle Kant's thoughts should be mentioned. Even though in philosophy, Kant respected Descartes rationalism, in art field and aesthetic, he expressed independent concepts. He believed that artistic beauty is related to pleasure and sensual perception but not to conceptualization and scientific recognition. Kant follows

⁷ 329-384 B.C

⁸ 327-427 B.C

⁹ 341-271 B.C

¹⁰ c. 110 – prob. c. 40 or 35 BC

eighteenth-century tradition in distinguishing two aesthetic categories, the beautiful and the sublime, and his aesthetic theory includes discussions of both. (Ginsborg, 2011)

On the other hand, in the 18th century, a sort of philosophical insight was proposed and current under Hedonism. Under the intellectual pattern of Jeremy Bentham¹¹, 18th century English philosopher, Hedonists boomed and expanded their intellectual bases. Bentham defined as the "fundamental axiom" of his philosophy the principle that "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong". (Bentham, 1977)

Romanticism and Hedonistic Aesthetic

Romanticism is not a term indicator of and historical era or certain and special artistic movement. In reality, the aspects of romantic beauty are realized genuine and are demonstrated as Purposeful types. "Romanticism describes not only a style but also an attitude. It is chiefly concerned with imagination and the emotions, and is often understood as a reaction against the focus on rationality". (Stokstad, 2008) Romanticism is derived from the language of Latin, and bases its objectives on a poetic or melancholic spirit. Whereas Realism, "reflected the positivist belief that art should show unvarnished truth, and realists took up subjects that were generally regarded as not important enough for a serious work of art". (Stokstad, 2008)

Since the extreme measure in romantic art is the artist sensation and the same reason is founded on artist's feeling and enthusiasm, the satisfaction can be considered as the most important and original goal of art. On the other side, Romantic art may be defined as something that satisfies people with their present routine habits and traditions and such satisfaction and pleasure is the bases of Romantic thoughts. Anyhow, Corce considers hedonistic aesthetic a sort of attitude whose basis is a pleasure or pain which is separated from concepts of social and economical activities or whatever is related to its conceptual content. He said As we are opposed to hedonism in general, that is to say, to the theory which is based on the pleasure and pain intrinsic to economy and accompanies every other form of activity, confounding the content and that which

¹¹ Jeremy Bentham (15 February 1748 – 6 June 1832). He is regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism.

contains it, and fails to recognize any process but the hedonistic; so we are opposed to aesthetic hedonism in particular, which looks upon the aesthetic at any rate, if not also upon all other activities, as a simple fact of feeling, and confounds the pleasurable of expression, which is the beautiful, with the pleasurable and nothing more, and with the pleasurable of all sorts. (Croce, 1909)

Hedonistic Aesthetics and Painting Restoration in the 19th Century

Many of those who have reviewed the history of art and restoration acknowledge that there are two different attitudes as the bases for restoration of monuments in whole history. First is the method whose audiences are the art lovers and is based on a glance of aesthetic qualities, legibility, and noble essence of painting. The second method is based on a scientific attitude, archaeological, and of course, conservative which mostly pointed on identification and readings of historic information.

As Helen Glanville¹² in translation of *A History of the Restoration and Conservation of Works of Art* written by Alessandro Conti¹³ acknowledged how she has chosen the phrase Aesthetic Restoration as a replacement for Italian phrase *Restauro Amatoriale*¹⁴ for some of the repairs carried out on paintings in the 19th century and the manner by which this type of repair is in confrontation with Conservation-Restoration to its present sense.

Although these two attitudes seem much different from each other, both are eventually trying to draw the attention of the art lovers. The attitude of this study is based on the first method in regard to restoration of paintings in a special glance called aesthetics hedonism by placing priority to tangible examples of European restorative community that were carrying out restorations on paintings during the 19th century for public and private collections.

Giuseppe Molteni and Painting Restoration

¹² Research Associate, Hamilton Kerr Institute

¹³ Alessandro Conti (Florence, 1946 - Siena, May 5, 1994) was a historian of art and history of Italian restoration.

¹⁴ Amateur Restoration

The attitudes of the first director of the London National Gallery, Sir Charles Eastlake and his restorer, Giuseppe Molteni like Eastlake an academically trained painter, and the director of the Brera Gallery in Milan during his last six years.(Partridge, 2006)

He was following painting as a professional and at the same time was so successful in restoration of painting. Eastlake praised him so much and many of Italian paintings bought for National Gallery were given to him for restoration. He had a special look toward restoration of shortages and disadvantages of paintings. This look, which has the major part of this study, permit any activity of restoration up to removal of all aesthetical, morphological, and structural problems.

Indeed it was his express desire that restoration be further systematized at the Brera. several letters to the Brera President record Molteni's concern that pictures restoration be more regulated in order to facilitate his work and improve the overall maintenance of the collection. (Richmond, Backer, 2011)

Figure 1: Lorenzo Lotto, Della Torre portrait (1513- 1515), before and after the removal of Giuseppe Molteni's restoration. London, National Gallery



Source: Conti, 2007.

Molteni's Aesthetic restorations can be clearly seen in this painting (Figure 1). Molteni's regard included addition of element to the original painting, correction of problems, changing color tonality in tableaux, and reconstruction of works with styles of other centuries. Even in some letters, he requested the demand for restoration on some

paintings as remuneration for his other works. This attitude is mostly toward visual hedonism in construction of paintings rather than the samples which are following the resuscitation of historical specialties, archaeological, or technological. Molteni's hedonistic view demonstrates to a large extent the dominant characteristics of this special view in the 19th century.

As mentioned before, the property of concept of aesthetic hedonism which Croce defined as the highest level of sensation and basis for many artistic interpretation and judgments is completely traceable in the heart of pure –minded Molteni's view and other artist-repairer of the said century.

The depth of this attitude can be seen in Gustavo Frizzoni's¹⁵ view about one of Pisanello¹⁶ works (at that time known as a Vittorio Pisano) which is kept in London National Gallery. Depicting The Virgin Appearing to Saints Anthony and George, also in the National Gallery, Gustavo Frizzoni remarked that: "It is a shame that this work, the only panel in existence of this renowned master, should have undergone after its acquisition in Ferrara, a restoration which corresponds rather to a complete reworking of the painting; a repainting which however accurately executed, is not for us as welcome as the original would have been. To the extent that the restorer, who was Professor Molteni, a character as facetious as he was knowledgeable and refined in his tastes, believed that he had so immersed himself in the spirit of the artist that having accomplished his work, he was wont to say amongst friends, that he no longer called himself Giuseppe Molteni, but Vittorio Molteni." (Conti, 2007)

But Molteni continued his restorations in National Gallery. On the other side, regarding the letters left from him, the same attitude about time patina can be retrieved in the 19th century. He believed the point which is more and more important, is exact cleaning and removing patina created by time lapse which had left shrinkages on some points of the work. This performance should be done with much care and each section should be cleaned proportionate to its needs and of course, as far as possible, the contaminated surface must be cleaned as per the rules of good restoration.

¹⁵ Art historian, 11 august 1840 Bergamo- 10 february 1919 Milan.

¹⁶ Pisanello (c. 1395 – c. 1455), was one of the most distinguished painters of the early Italian Renaissance.

The tradition of aesthetic restoration of Molteni group which included some repainting, work completion and even signatures were mostly carried out by the order of collectors and at the time was entitled as Artistic Restoration. This model clearly indicates the hedonistic view toward painting restoration in the 19th century.

The Louvre Museum and Painting Cleaning

Almost concurrently with the National Gallery controversy, Frédéric Villot¹⁷, curator of paintings at the Louvre, instituted in 1848 a program to remove the “brown soup” or “museum gravy” obscuring many of its paintings, tonings and var

nishes applied over the years by contract artist/restorers. An artist and former pupil of Eugène Delacroix¹⁸, Villot in addition himself cleaned and restored paintings. (Keck, 1984) Even though French punctilious critics made severe attacks against him, Villot forcefully defended his actions against his critics whom he considered to have not the foggiest concept of the problems one faces in the work. He drew attention to his thirty years experience. He emphasized the uniqueness of each painting. He declared that only one definite statement can be made: the cleaning of the painting should be compatible with it; all activities should be restricted to the bare necessities. In other words, there must be total respect for the work of the creative artist. “Cleaning the Rubens paintings” in the Medici Gallery, Villot argued “had produced a large number of conversions among the most fanatic partisans of yellow and brown ... there are those who cannot appreciate paintings until these no longer resemble what they were when their artists finished them ... let such people provide themselves with glasses tinted according to their taste.” (Keck, 1984)

Whatever is seen in villot thoughts and his like-minded is the same establishing a visual beauty which had been at the beginning of the creation of the work. These complete cleaning operations brought along a sort of pleasuring in the audience of the 19th century to watch the painting similar to the initial vision of the creator; which of course is not consistent with the taste of Romantic extremists of the century. Probably, this insight

¹⁷ 31 October 1809 – 27 May 1875

¹⁸ (26 April 1798 – 13 August 1863) was a French Romantic artist regarded from the outset of his career as the leader of the French Romantic school.

specialty is more obvious in France than any other country. Hedonistic aesthetic viewpoints in other countries are dominant to other aesthetic thoughts.

Stefano Bardini's¹⁹ Teachings in Italy

The radical cleanings carried out in many 20th century restorations of early Italian works can be highlighted, initially, through comparison with an example of an aesthetic restoration performed in the late 19th century. (Hoeniger, 1999) The last case of this article is Bardini group in Italy which is in a type similar to Eastlake-Molteni in England. Several of Aesthetic restorations in this century which were based on exaggerated cleanings and complete re-buildings rooted in Bardini's teachings. Hoeniger counted three principles as the basis of thoughts for restorations of the last decades of this century: Bardini's teachings, tastes of customers, and of course fashion and mood of the time.

¹⁹ Pieve San Stefano 13 Maggio 1836_ Firenze 12 Settembre 1922. Was an Italian connoisseur and art dealer in Florence who specialized in Italian paintings.

Figure 2: Simone Martini, Santa Caterina d'Alessandria (1322-1323) before and after the Bardini's restoration in 1870.



Source: Hoeniger, 1999.

Bardini's training was quite typical for restorers during the 19th century. He trained as a painter and expert copyist, learning through the study of historical techniques how to restore works invisibly for the art market. Bardini studied painting at the Accademi Belle Arti in Florence beginning in 1854. There, under the romantic revival of interest in medieval and Renaissance art, students were encouraged to reproduce past works in their original techniques, either faithfully or in freer modern interpretations, in order to understand the paintings in a purely technical sense. A specific class was also given over to teaching the art students the craft of reproducing or restoring old works of art, whether painting or sculpture. (Hoeniger, 1999) Probably in that age, his rhythmic color tunings were considered very successful because the repaired parts were not distinguishable from the original sections and were compatible with the merely Italian aesthetic assumptions in that century but according to Alessandro Conti it is impossible not to count them historical forge. (Conti, 1981)

However, this type of historical forge is based on the reinforcement of sensation for creating pleasure in art works and perhaps it is not possible to criticize it as per the taste of a certain group in that century.

Now, the three studied samples can be re-evaluated from proposed aspects in that century. If we want to review the concepts of aesthetics in the second half of the 19th century, probably we have to subordinate the viewpoints of art lovers and aesthetics who wanted art for art sake and not anything more than that so that we can find a justification for then repairer's attitude. But the aesthetics of the 19th century, in the presence of a fictitious atmosphere full of romantic contradictions and slogans such as art for art sake, applied education mostly for legitimacy of art and confined to the enjoyment from the artwork. Criteria for evaluation of artworks in this period of time were by the same token and merely confined to the aesthetic hedonism resulted directly, and without mediators, from works of art.

This pure look to art is a sort of message to announce the liberation of artist in this century. This announcement which in a way emphasizes the responsibility of artists, hold a direct relation with the restorers. Assuming that in this era, restorers are artists as well; this type of liberation is evident in restoration performances applied on paintings. Actually they placed their duty on the basis of the theory of enjoyment for the whole human community; not in their own works rather in restoration methods which are after more completion of the work instead of introducing its history. It seems that the restorers were trying to prepare the said theory in the heart of historical works. It is important to mention that art and reproductions of pleasure resulted by it is among concepts which were under special attention during the second half of the 19th century. Andréa Rothe believes that guiding and directing of restoration approaches are under the influence of philosophical measures during various historical eras. He says philosophical criteria often lead restorers to transform paintings to conform to contemporary tastes in the field of restoration. Such concerns affect approaches to cleaning, retouching, and the application of surface coatings and thus fundamentally influence the appearance of a work of art. Some modern conservation theories provide strict guidelines that should be followed to achieve an "honest" result. Unfortunately, well intentioned practices can be totally foreign to the nature of the painting. (Rothe, 2001) The directing is in a form that even the most possible interferences in historical works can be justified by a philosophical attitude.

Conclusion

Aesthetic hedonism is among the set of philosophical discussions which has its origin in ancient Rome and Greece and, in addition to, its flourishing in the 18th century, witnessed a significant growth in the second half of the 19th century. The tendency of aesthetic in process of restoration of this century, especially the procedures leading to perfect and ideal restorations, is quite evident. Regarding the attitudes and concepts raised in the field of paintings restoration in Europe, the reasoning of Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, which is verily establishment and domination of a sort of aesthetic insight based on hedonism on the restorations carried out in the second half of the century is acceptable. The principle of thoughts and foundations utilized in performed restorations, based on mere aesthetic argumentations, completion, correction and eventually satisfaction of the audiences or customers sense of pleasure, are significant points in this attitude. Special viewpoint of Molteni in National Gallery, Villo in the Louvre Museum, and Bardini in Italy are small samples of preservation of this concept in restoration view of this century. Art and reproductions of pleasure are among concepts adopted by artists and restorers of paintings and this issue verifies the idea of figures like Rothe who believed that restoration approaches are under the influences of philosophical measures and indicators common in each historical era.

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