Value Pluralism in Restoration Aesthetics

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In the restoration of art and artifacts there are three salient types of value to consider: relic, aesthetic, and practical. Relic value includes an object's age, aura, originality, authenticity, and epistemic value. Aesthetic value is is connected to how an object looks, sounds, or tastes. Practical value involves whether a thing can be used as designed—whether a book can be read, a building occupied, a car driven. I argue that while these are all legitimate values, it is impossible for a restorer to maximize them all. I conclude that restoration inexorably involves aesthetic choices; there is no supreme value to be maximized and we should be pluralists about the right balance of values. Restoration is like baking a cake; there are many wrong ways to do it, but there are many right ways as well.

1. Problems in Restoration and Conservation

There are numerous dilemmas that arise in the course of art restoration and conservation.[1] One is the target age of recovery. For example, The British Museum contains a fifth century CE parchment with the Latin annals of the historian Granius Licinianus. That text was subsequently overwritten with a Latin grammatical treatise in the sixth century, which itself was overwritten with a Syriac text of St John Chrysostom in the ninth or tenth century. If we were to restore that parchment, would we scrape off St John Chrysostom? The Latin grammar? Conservators would be apoplectic at such suggestions, preferring to put the palimpsest unaltered in an acid-free box in a dark vault. But what about the ongoing restoration of the Acropolis? Here the acid-free box is not an option. One present controversy concerns the planned reconstruction of a first century CE Roman marble staircase on the western access of the Acropolis while the work at the top aims to make it look as it did in the fifth century BCE. Critics object that this is inconsistent. What is the proper historical age the Acropolis should represent when the works are completed? These are not easy questions.

A second related problem is determining the temporal appearance of the restoration. That is, should the restoration make the object look as if it did when new, or should it still have the signs of age? For example, antique paper (book leaves, prints, drawings, maps) is

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prone to discoloration from foxing or water damage. It is possible to wash these items to make the paper as clean and bright as it was the day it was made without affecting paint or ink. Those who prefer the patina of age want to see the wrinkled visage, not the first flush of youth. This is the controversy over the 2011 restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's painting *The Virgin and Child with St Anne* (1503), which was so brightened after treatment that two conservation experts on the panel advising the restoration resigned in protest. By contrast, comic book collectors who have their treasures restored want *Detective Comics* #27 to look as pristine as possible, not like a well-thumbed 90-year-old piece of ephemera.
A third issue is whether a restoration should be obvious or invisible. Partisans of the obvious hold that invisible restorations are deceptive, because someone looking at or using the object could not tell what was original and what is new. Therefore, there is something dishonest about the presentation that fails to respect the authenticity of the original artwork. Instead of a viewer seeing, for example, an actual medieval triptych, what they see instead is the intervention, which is erroneously taken as the original (Beck, 1999). Compare the International Council on Monuments and Sites restoration charter, Article 12: 'Replacements of missing parts … must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the historic or artistic evidence' (ICOMOS, 1964).[2] An example of a highly visible restoration is the Ocaklı Ada Castle in the Şile district of Istanbul. There is no mistaking the new works done a few years ago from the ancient ones that date back 2000 years.

Defenders of the invisibility view consider obvious restorations to be hideous, and compare the white, blocky Ocaklı Ada Castle to SpongeBob SquarePants, or something out of Minecraft. They argue that undetectable, hidden restorations can be identified as such—to purchasers, tourists, scholars, or whomever. It would be dishonest to sell a book with a perfect facsimile replacing a missing leaf and not tell the buyer. But on this view, there is nothing wrong with using a letterpress facsimile on period paper instead of a cheap and obvious photocopy.

2. Types of Value in Restoration

All of the preceding matters are ongoing philosophical problems in restoration that deserve careful analysis. However, even if they were satisfactorily resolved, there remains a deep conflict among the types of value salient to restorers. The three types to be discussed are *relic*, *aesthetic*, and *practical* value. I will argue that all three are legitimate values worth caring about, and they are in irresolvable tension with each other. It is not possible for a restorer to maximize all three; there are different levers a restorer can manipulate, and as one moves forwards, another pulls back. I will defend value pluralism in restoration: there is not one uniquely best mix of relic, aesthetic, and practical value. Like baking a cake, there are many wrong ways to do it, but there are many right ways as well.

There are numerous kinds of restoration, not all of which will be considered here. I am bracketing the restoration of natural objects like fossils or rainforests. A large,

2 One wonders what their view would be of cosmetic plastic surgery.

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well-preserved trilobite is more appealing than a small and broken one, even though they are equally authentic natural objects. A fine and intact trilobite has a greater aesthetic value, although that value is not artistic. There is no artist with fossils and natural objects; they are not artefacts. So whatever a restorer is trying to do with a fossil is more than preserving the relic value, but she is not aiming to increase artistic value. I am also setting aside the restoration of memorial sites like the Gettysburg battlefield or Auschwitz. While human-made, it is also wrong to think of them in terms of aesthetic value. The restoration of memorial sites is primarily addressed to maintaining their practical value, keeping them robust enough to receive visitors and resist the degradations of time. There may be an ethical component in their preservation as well (Lamarque, 2016, Matthes, 2016). In this paper, I am focusing on the repair and conservation of artefacts such as paintings, books, sculpture, automobiles, furniture, and architecture. It is in these cases that relic, aesthetic, and practical values most often conflict.

3. Relic Value

What is *relic* value? John Ruskin, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, writes, 'Indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, or in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity' (Ruskin, 1849, Ch. 6, p. 172). We can feel the presence of ancient buildings, Ruskin thought, like silent sentinels from the past that command our respect.

Alois Riegl's account of age value overlaps with the idea of relic value, but they are not the same thing. For him, 'age-value embraces every artefact without regard to its original significance and purpose, as long as it reveals the passage of a considerable period of time' (Riegl 1982, p. 24). Simon James argues that the proper attitude towards such items from the ancient world is humility (James, 2013). While we typically think of relics as antiquities, great age is not a necessary condition for a thing to have relic value. Restricted runs of modern works are an attempt to infuse them with relic value; for example numbered and signed giclée prints, or limited editions of books. Perhaps the most extreme example is non-fungible tokens (NFTs), which are a unique digital ledger of ownership for a digital object. While qualitatively identical copies of digital art can be replicated without bound, thus obviating the sense of an 'original' version, NFTs cannot. The point of an NFT is to imbue one copy with relic value, even though it does not enhance the object in any other way. Whether NFTs succeed in this objective is a matter of controversy.

Walter Benjamin seems to be hoeing adjacent ground with his idea of an object's aura. He argues that authentic objects of the kind Ruskin addresses are the sole original exemplars of a thing, and that mechanical reproduction diminishes the authority that they possess. If there were a thousand copies of Versailles, they would diminish Versailles itself. It is the uniqueness of an *objet d'art* that gives rise to its aura. Ordinary objects are produced in great multiples and so have no special significance. When we are able to make exact copies of a painting, a statue, or a photograph, then it too becomes an ordinary object, just one of thousands without that aura of specialness and vitality. The unapproachableness of

the authentic original becomes dissolute and fades away (Benjamin, 1968). Benjamin's concept of aura is not restricted to artefacts; even natural objects like trees may have an aura, due to the specialness of their unique presence. The General Sherman sequoia in California comes to mind as an example. However, as noted above, I am setting aside discussion of non-artefacts in the present discussion of restoration.

While Ruskin and Riegl emphasize age and Benjamin focuses on uniqueness, they are all attempting to work out what makes some objects stand out as distinctive and important merely as objects.

Carolyn Korsmeyer offers the best account of this type of value. 'Genuineness,' she writes, 'is the best available concept to understand the thrill of encounters with things that are prized for being original, authentic, rare, very old, or unusually special' (Korsmeyer, 2019, p. 21). Korsmeyer takes great pains to argue that genuineness is a species of aesthetic value, and I agree with her assessment. This kind of aesthetic value can only be experienced by being in the presence of such objects, as opposed to seeing digitized images or reconstructions (cf. Lamarque, 2016, p. 287), and in particular, Korsmeyer argues, by touch. No amount of digitization can replace the haptic experience of reality, of the past made present.

Korsmeyer's idea that touch is the sensory modality by which we can best appreciate the value of genuineness is a good insight. The *Domesday Book* (1086), William the Conqueror's comprehensive account of his newly acquired domain, has been bound and re-bound numerous times over the last millennium. But those earlier bindings have been preserved: they once touched the *Domesday Book*, and by doing so they too became special.[3] Flavio Marzo, head of the Cambridge Colleges Conservation Consortium, relates an encounter when he was a conservator at the British Library (BL). The BL had just wrapped up an exhibition highlighting the eighth-century St Cuthbert Gospel, the earliest example of bookbinding in the West. A woman looking for the exhibition bumped into Marzo and found out that he was the conservator who had worked on the St Cuthbert. 'She asked if she could touch me,' he recalls. By transitivity, she could feel the St. Cuthbert Gospel through him.[4]

I will use the term 'relic value' instead of Korsmeyer's 'genuineness', which can be ambiguous. There are many dimensions of genuineness, most of which do not properly capture the idea of relic value. One meaning of 'genuine' is that of 'accurate' or 'truthful'. In this sense, one might consider the *Book of Mormon* to be a huckster's scam and not a genuine religious revelation, or regard L. Ron Hubbard's (1950) *Dianetics* as not a genuine scholarly work but instead a silly piece of mid-century pseudoscience. Nonetheless, they are both genuine foundational religious texts of historical importance. A different meaning of 'genuine' is 'exactly what it appears to be'. Well, what of a letterpress facsimile of the 1830 *Book of Mormon*? It is genuinely the *Book of Mormon*, but not a genuine first edition. A poster of *Mona Lisa* is, in one sense, genuinely *Mona Lisa* (it is not a different artwork),

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3 After the ring is destroyed in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Frodo lies recovering in Minas Tirith, Gandalf tells him, 'even the orc-rags that you bore in the black land, Frodo, shall be preserved. No silk or linens, nor any armour or heraldry could be more honourable' (2002, p. 962). The repulsive clothes of the enemy were sanctified by touch; Frodo imbued them with value.

4 Personal communication with Flavio Marzo.

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and in another sense not (it is not a 500–year-old Leonardo painting). 'Relic value' captures Korsmeyer's idea of genuineness while being a less confusing term.

Relic value is partly epistemic. There are three types of epistemic value an object may have, and relic value includes one of these types. The first kind of epistemic value is *propositional content*. Obviously, most objects will lack this, although items like books, documents, letters, tablets, and so forth will have it. Propositional content value consists in what those texts state—the assertions, commentaries, poetry, questions, and records that are presented in the texts. This content is what is (ideally) preserved in translation.

The second type of epistemic value is *inferential value*: what other facts we can conclude from what is encoded in the object. The Rosetta Stone famously repeats the same decree from King Ptolemy V Epiphanes in three languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics, Demotic, and Ancient Greek. The decree establishing the divine cult of the new ruler is the Rosetta Stone's propositional content value. The main inferential value of the Rosetta Stone was that it allowed scholars for the first time to translate hieroglyphics. If the stone had been an actual translation manual or dictionary, then that would have been its propositional content value, not inferential value. Similarly, a Sumerian clay tablet recording a grain transaction allows us to infer something about the economy in Mesopotamia, even though the propositional content is not about economics. The content and inferential values of the clay tablet or the Rosetta Stone could have originated elsewhere, in papyrus scrolls, or other tablets and steles. Furthermore, those values can be replicated utilizing high-quality images that allow scholars to read them, produce new translations, and study ancient languages. The specific objects are not needed to preserve those values.

The third type of epistemic value is *epistemic relic value*. This consists of what we can learn from the physical object itself. To stay with the Rosetta Stone example, we have learnt that it is a fragment of a larger stele, that it is made of an igneous stone called granodiorite, that it weighs 1680lbs, that it probably had a rounded top, is missing fourteen or fifteen lines of hieroglyphs, and likely once had an engraving of the king being presented to the gods. This knowledge requires the stone itself. Interference with the physical object reduces its epistemic relic value. After the Rosetta Stone's arrival in London in the early nineteenth century, the engravings were chalked white to make them more visible, and the stone coated in carnauba wax to protect it from grubby-fingered visitors. The effect made the stone so dark that it was mistakenly thought to be black basalt. The wax was not removed until a 1999 cleaning, which then allowed it to be properly identified as granodiorite. That information made possible further investigations into its quarrying and origins.

Historical studies of artefacts are driven by epistemic relic value. The codex form of the book was first recorded by the Roman poet Martial in the first century CE, and codexes gradually overtook scrolls in popularity until, within 500 years, the codex was the dominant book form. Studying books as objects reveals that they were once handwritten on vellum, the leaves were sewn together using a variety of techniques, they were originally bound in wooden boards, and so on. Examining the relic epistemic value of books from different periods in time allows us to trace out the evolution of their making, from Coptic-sewn vellum quires covered in quartersawn white oak and pigskin to modern Smyth-sewn machine-printed wood pulp paper sandwiched

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in cardboard. One research group used the techniques of evolutionary biology to produce a phylogenetic tree showing the relationships among fifty-eight extant fifteenth-century manuscripts of 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue' from *The Canterbury Tales* (Barbrook et al., 1998).

In this section, I have argued that Ruskin, Benjamin, Korsmeyer, and others are right about the existence and importance of relic value. It is found in the tangible experience of objects that embody their past, things that are not mere replicas or facsimiles, but are survivors. Being in their presence—and especially being able to feel them—gives the frisson of time travel and the mutuality of being touched back by history. The more unmodified and unchanged these things, the more *original* they are, the more thrilling the experience of a temporal chain of value. I have also argued that part of that value is epistemic: what we can still learn from the artefact that we could not in any other way.

4. Aesthetic Value

Now, however, I want to turn to the importance of *aesthetic* value, particularly in the context of restoration. Aesthetic value is a broad topic and well-trampled ground. Most writers take it to include an experiential component, but not exhausted by that (Goldman, 2006). One cannot fully, or possibly at all, appreciate a piece of music, a painting, a book, a temple, a memorial locket, a sword, without knowing a great deal more about it than how it looks or sounds. Cultural context and meaning, the object's place in the history of art, and other forms of historical significance all come into play. Kulka (1981) distinguishes between the value of an artwork due to its cultural/historical significance and creative originality (what he calls its artistic or art-historical value) and its beauty (what he calls its aesthetic value proper). While I believe that Kulka is groping towards the relic/aesthetic value division I am defending, I acknowledge that there may be alternate ways of taxonomizing value. What is clear is that background knowledge and contextual understanding are needed for the full experience of an object. The awe one feels in encountering the Antikythera Mechanism in Athens's National Archaeological Museum was surely not felt by the sailors in 1901 who hauled up a weird, unknown lump of bronze from an ancient shipwreck. To take another example, a blot of mud on its own has little aesthetic value, but as painter Eugene Delacroix famously said, 'Give me mud, let me surround it as I think fit, and it shall be the radiant flesh of Venus' (Hardin, 1988, p. 49). In this case, context is all.

Restorers cannot create an object's place in cultural history or its relic value. But they can create and enhance a thing's beauty and diminish its ugliness, notions that Zangwill characterizes as the pre-eminent aesthetic concepts (Zangwill, 1998, p. 75). While restorers can do little about what an object means to others, its place in the history of ideas, or its religious and political significance, they *can* affect how something looks, sounds, feels, or tastes.

Aesthetic and relic value are distinct forms of value, as the example of forgeries clearly shows. Henricus ('Han') van Meegeren was one of the most successful forgers of the twentieth century, creating numerous paintings in the style of the seventeenth-century Dutch masters such as Frans Hals, Pieter de Hooch, Gerard ter Borch, and especially Johannes Vermeer. His masterpiece, *Supper at Emmaus*, was executed with such craftsmanship and detail that it fooled all the leading experts of the day to conclude that it was

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a genuine Vermeer. Van Meegeren was also famous for duping Reichsmarshall Hermann Göring into buying another fake Vermeer, *Christ and the Adulteress*. After World War II, Dutch authorities charged van Meegeren with selling cultural treasures to the Nazis, and to escape the accusation, he had to finally confess that he was a forger. So the Dutch charged him with that instead.

During van Meegeren's trial he was reported as saying 'Yesterday this picture was worth millions. Experts and arts lovers came from all over the world to see it. Today it is worth nothing and nobody would cross the road even to see it for free. But the picture has not changed. What's different?' (Han, 2017, p. 24). Van Meegeren is right: the aesthetic value of the painting had not changed. It was still as creatively composed, elegantly painted, and pleasing to the eye as it was before. What is different is that its perceived relic value plummeted to nothing (cf. Kulka, 1981, p. 342). This example puts the lie to the naïve view that art is appreciated solely for its aesthetic value.

The privileging of relic value over aesthetic value just described is not universal. Byung-Chul Han argues that there is a longstanding and respected tradition in China of *shanzhai*, fakes. In the West, forgers like van Meegeren are arrested, but in China, a good forger is revered. Han writes, 'Chang Dai-chien, one of the best-known Chinese painters of the twentieth century, got his breakthrough when a famous collector exchanged an original Old Master for his forgery' (Han, 2017, p. 16). The breakthrough was not because Dai-chien had perpetrated a legendary scam or exhibited populist civil disobedience like Robin Hood. Rather, it was because he had proven that his work was every bit as good as the Old Masters—in fact, it was better. Therefore his canvas itself was better. *Shanzhai* is a Platonic view: a painting like Hiroshige's *Plum Garden in Kameido* is but a flawed physical example of the unobtainable Platonic form of the perfect *Plum Garden in Kameido.* An expert forger could produce a superior version of *Plum Garden in Kameido* to Hiroshige's, one that is even closer to the Platonic form. A true connoisseur would prefer the newer painting, the one with greater aesthetic value. Producing such a painting was Dai-chien's achievement.

The *shanzhai* tradition is alien to many in the West. Psychologist Paul Bloom writes, 'If I owned a painting by Chagall, I would not be pleased if someone switched it with a duplicate, even if I couldn't tell the difference. I want *that painting*, not merely something that looks just like it' (Bloom, 2010, p. 87). Similarly, Korsmeyer thinks it is self-evident that forgeries and fakes 'are morally problematic' (Korsmeyer, 2019, p. 34). These attitudes are not universal: a Chinese collector of paintings cares only for the beauty of the work, and not whose name is signed or what year it was made. A superior forgery is superior *tout court*, and the moral problematicity of this view is self-evident only in the Western art world.

If the Chinese view sounds strange—that relic value means little or nothing and aesthetic value is all—consider fake luxury goods, like handbags and watches. You can buy fakes of any famous watch brand, not cheap, easily spotted knockoffs but carefully crafted copies costing hundreds of dollars. Even grand complications have been replicated. These watches, largely made in China, are so sophisticated that only trained experts using jeweller's loupes are able to tell the difference between them and Swiss originals.[5]

5 See Watchfinder & Co. (2019).

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A high-end Rolex Submariner 114060 superclone is about $400, 1/30 the price of the genuine. What aesthetic reason is there to prefer the real one? Unless you have money to burn, the answer is not because the fine finishing of a part deep inside the automatic winder is microscopically smoother. The same stainless steel, sapphire crystal, ceramic face, and bracelet mechanism is used in both; to the naked eye, they look identical. The only broadly aesthetic reason to prefer the genuine article is in terms of history, tradition, journey of the brand—in short, relic value. If it sounds ridiculous to spend thousands of dollars on something no more beautiful, reliable, or impressive, it is because aesthetic value seems much more important than relic value.

Perhaps the best and most familiar example of the dominance of aesthetic value over relic is musical covers. Some musical covers are transformative, like Jeff Buckley's (1994) cover of Leonard Cohen's (1984) 'Hallelujah', but aficionados still know that it is Cohen's original song. However, there are many covers so iconic that very, very few people could name the original artist. Here are some examples with the most famous performer in parentheses: 'Hey Joe' (Jimi Hendrix, 1967), 'Respect' (Aretha Franklin, 1967), 'Blinded by the Light' (Manfred Mann, 1976), 'You Really Got Me' (Van Halen, 1978), 'Dazed and Confused' (Led Zeppelin, 1967), 'Cocaine' (Eric Clapton, 1977), 'Black Magic Woman' (Santana, 1968), 'John Barleycorn Must Die' (Traffic, 1970), 'When the Levee Breaks' (Led Zeppelin, 1971), 'House of the Rising Sun' (The Animals, 1964), 'Tainted Love' (Soft Cell, 1981). No one thinks that these artists are frauds, or that they are in some way culpably dishonest. It is more plausible to view their contributions Platonically: Hendrix's brilliant recording of 'Hey Joe' more closely approaches the ideal of that song than the long-forgotten and much inferior (but first) recording by The Leaves.[6] If the Dutch treated paintings the same way as songs, van Meegeren would not have gone to prison; indeed museums might seek his works more than Vermeer.

I have argued in this section that (1) aesthetic value is distinct from relic value and (2) there are many cases in which aesthetic value is more important than relic value. The complex relationship between aesthetic and relic value in restoration will be discussed shortly. I have focused on the limit cases of fakes and covers to show that, even there, preferring aesthetic to relic value can be an attractive and reasonable choice.

5. Practical Value

An additional form of value is *practical*. Many types of art have no practical value, or they have very little. What is the practical value of a statue or a painting? Presumably, they must at least be visible; ones locked unseen in a closet surely have no practical value at all. However, plenty of things with both aesthetic and relic value were made to be practical: books to read, furniture to be used, automobiles to drive, buildings to be occupied. The preservation of this practical value is essential for them to remain the kinds of things that they are.

To illustrate, consider deconsecrated churches or temples of dead religions. They have lost their practical value and may be repurposed for other uses. The Hagia Sophia in

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6 Judge for yourself. The Leaves (1966), Hendrix (1967).

Istanbul was originally a Christian church, then an Islamic mosque, then a state museum, and was recently turned back into a mosque. Its practical value has shifted dramatically over time. Or consider the 2000-year-old Egyptian Temple of Dendur. Facing flooding from Lake Nasser following the construction of the Aswan High Dam, it was removed from its original site by the Egyptian government and given to the United States, where it is now rebuilt inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Temple of Dendur has not been a temple for a very long time; what resides in the Met is more like the fossilized remains of an extinct animal. Dendur's Temple retains its relic and aesthetic value, but has no practical value at all.

Other objects with practical value are so precious that they are little used. The sixth-century Gospels that personally belonged to St. Augustine is seldom-removed from the vault in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, except to inaugurate the Archbishops of Canterbury. The Elizabethan Great Bed of Ware is housed in the Victoria & Albert Museum, and no one has slept in it for 150 years. The Porsche 550 Spyder was built as a race car in the mid 1950s. Porsche only ever built ninety of them, and it is famous as the car that actor James Dean was driving when he died in a wreck. At $5 million apiece on the market, the 550 Spyder is what is known as a 'trailer queen'. It is too valuable to actually drive, so it is simply ferried to car shows in a trailer. However, the Augustine Gospels could be leafed through, four couples could still sleep in the Bed of Ware, and a proper 550 Spyder could be driven down the road. They still possess their practical value, even though it may be seldom implemented. If those things lost their practical value entirely, then they would be no more than simulacra. A car no one could drive in principle is a mere prop.

I have argued in this section that (1) practical value is distinct from both relic and aesthetic value, and (2) the preservation of practical value, even if attenuated and seldom implemented, is needed for many objects to remain the kinds of things they are. Practical value cannot be wholly discounted in restorations.

6. Monetary Value

What of financial value? Probably when most people think of the value of a restoration, they think of what the object will be worth on the open market afterwards, or they are concerned with the expense of the restoration and expect the restorer to make it worthwhile by increasing the object's commodity value.

It is a widespread belief that all restorations diminish the financial value of an object. This is false. The notion that relic value is the primary arbiter of financial value is an idea that has waxed and waned over history. In the eighteenth century it was common for books to be published in cheap cardboard, with paper spines and just enough sewing to hold the book together. Their pages would be unopened (still exhibiting closed folds at top and fore-edge, making the book unreadable) and uncut (the edges of the text block were uneven and ragged looking). It was expected that the purchaser would take the book to a commercial bindery to be bound properly, which would include resewing and ploughing the edges smooth. Customers could have the book done up in a basic minimal binding, or something fancy and elaborate, according to taste and budget. A book correctly bound, even in a simple calfskin binding with little decoration, would have been worth more

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money on the eighteenth-century open market than one still in the cheap publisher's wraps. Nowadays, a collector would be ecstatic to have an uncut, unopened first edition of Leibniz in the original boards. It would be more monetarily valuable than a pedestrian contemporary binding of the same book because of present-day relic fetishism, despite the fact that, with the pages unopened, it cannot be read and has no practical value.

Monetary value is responsive to changing market assessments about the relative importance of the other values listed. For example, it was common in the early nineteenth century for older bindings to be torn off of books so that they could be re-bound in the latest decorative fashions. Not everyone approved; Emily Dickinson wrote:

> A precious – mouldering pleasure – 'tis –
> To meet an Antique Book –
> In just the Dress his Century wore –
> A privilege – I think –
> *Dickinson, 1924, Part One: Life*, p. 7.

Dickinson preferred her books to have the patina of age. Shannon Lee Dawdy writes, 'patina is [Benjamin's] aura made curiously concrete' (Dawdy, 2016, p. 11). The crazed darkened varnish of an armoire, or a worn knob polished by generations of hands are signifiers of relic value. As a surface property of objects, patina can become not just a signifier of the relic, but an aesthetic value in its own right. One task in restoration is to increase aesthetic value, and patina too can be replicated *de novo* (cf. Dawdy, 2016 pp. 132–135). Of course, not everyone wants to see patina, as mentioned earlier with comic collectors. Philatelists and numismatists agree; they too want their treasures looking as fresh and untouched as possible. In general, the desirability of patina and its contribution to aesthetic value is quite specific to the kind of object under consideration, and even varies within a category. A sixteenth-century book bound in stiff pigskin now weathered and hardened to resemble a veiny block of dirty marble has a desirable patina that a rotting, crumbling sheepskin binding on the same book does not. A full discussion of patina is beyond this paper.

In the present day, restorations risk lessening the financial value of an object under two conditions: the work is (1) unnecessary, or (2) incompetent. Here is an example of the first. Imagine a seventeenth-century book with a roughly contemporary binding that is adequate and intact, but nothing special. Rebinding the book will probably reduce its monetary worth unless the new binding is extremely fine work. If the same seventeenth book were disbound, or in a crude, incorrect, or dilapidated binding, then rebinding it to style would increase its monetary value. This point is even more dramatic with modern first editions, where the dust jacket can be three-quarters of the book's monetary value. No sane collector would discard the dust jacket and cut off the original binding on a first edition of *The Great Gatsby* in exchange for a new binding, no matter how elegant. To take another example, pulling a functional numbers-matching engine from a 1963 split-window Corvette just to replace it with a more powerful brand-new LS7 would reduce the car's value in a way that swapping in an LS7 for an underpowered non-original engine would not. Nonetheless, there's no reason to expect current tastes about the right mix of values to be eternal.

Incompetent restorations will certainly reduce an object's monetary value, unless it is a national-treasure level rarity that could not have a market price anyway. Incompetence

here is to be understood in terms of either practical or aesthetic value. A badly restored car can be unsafe to drive, a bungled re-roofing will not be watertight, and an inadequately calibrated antique watch will not keep time.[7] If a binder overlines a spine in rebinding, the book will be very stiff, open poorly, and not lie flat for reading. If the leather is over-pared (as was common in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries), then the book will be weak at the joints and it will not be long before the covers fall off. These are examples of diminished practical value.

The aesthetic value of a thing can also be lessened by a bad restoration, dragging down its financial value. There are innumerable examples of well-meaning but amateurish attempts at restoration.[8] Cleaning staff at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo accidentally dropped King Tutankhamen's funerary mask, snapping off his beard. In a panic, they glued it back on with household epoxy, inaccurately placing the beard and leaving a glueline at the edge. When the epoxy inadvertently dripped on Tut's face, they tried to scrape it off, scratching the gold in the process. Cecilia Giménez in Borja, Spain, thought she would take it upon herself to touch up *Ecce Homo*, a deteriorating 1930 fresco of Jesus wearing a crown of thorns. The locals refer to the result as *Ecce Mono* (behold the monkey). Outside the realm of fine art and antiquities, there are any number of old books someone tried to repair with tape, Chippendale chairs nailed back together, or classic cars a do-it-yourself owner tried to fix with the wrong parts and baling wire. Professional restorers dread working on items that amateurs tried to patch up themselves. Financially, a terrible repair is worse than none at all.

The opposite side of the coin is that even a spectacular restoration may not increase the financial value of a thing. Suppose someone takes their grandma's tattered, sauce-stained, yet beloved old cookbook to a fine binder. No matter how extravagant or tasteful the work done, the cookbook will still just be an old worthless cookbook that would be marked for a buck at a used bookstore. Sentimental value—which we can understand as idiosyncratic relic value—is all the cookbook has. It has no financial value, even if made beautiful.

I have argued in this section that (1) the financial value of an object is a complex function of its relic, aesthetic, and practical value, and this interplay changes with historical and cultural fashions. I have also argued that (2) this is why financial value cannot be examined as a sui generis form of value, and why it is not a value that a restorer can aim at directly.

7. Which Value is Most Important?

Option 1: Relic Value is Most Important

Defenders of this view include Camillo Boito, John Ruskin, William Morris, Rafael de Clercq, and Carolyn Korsmeyer. Referring to architecture, Ruskin stresses that aesthetic value must take a back seat to relic value:

> Do not let us talk then of restoration. The thing is a Lie from beginning to end … Watch an old building with an anxious care; guard it as best you may, and at any cost

7 Poorly executed home remodelling is called 'remuddling', an excellent neologism that deserves wider use.

8 For photos of some of these monstrosities, see Cascone (2019).

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> from every influence of dilapidation. Count its stones as you would jewels of a crown; set watches about it as if at the gates of a besieged city; bind it together with iron where it loosens; stay it with timber where it declines; *do not care about the unsightliness of the aid*. (Ruskin, 1849 Ch. 6, Para. XIX, italics added)

Boito concurs, 'with rare exceptions, only one wise course of action remains: to leave them [the works of art] alone or, where necessary, to free them of restorations, whether old or recent, bad or not too bad' (Price et al., 1996, p. 262). Morris calls restorers 'unoriginal and thoughtless hacks' and begs that we do no more than 'stave off decay' by as minimal interventions as possible (Morris, 1996). De Clercq also privileges relic value, writing '[the proper goal of] restoration is to make as few alterations as possible while aiming to return those properties that the artist intended the work to have, and which at some point after completion it actually had' (de Clercq, 2013, p. 274). Korsmeyer concurs, stating: 'Repairs and restorations that attempt the greatest possible retention of old materials are therefore high on my list of recommendations, even if the look of an artefact is compromised' (Korsmeyer, 2019, p. 197).

Option 2: Aesthetic value is Most Important

Defenders of this view include Matthew Parker, Cesare Brandi, and (with qualification) Peter Lamarque. While Boito, Ruskin, and Korsmeyer do not mind if appearance is sacrificed to preserve relic value, others do. Lamarque's operating principle is 'if possible, and in the absence of countervailing circumstances, you ought to try to preserve a beautiful object'. He argues that the rarer the object—like Michelangelo's *Pietà*, as opposed to common, but old, Chinese vases made for export—the more important it is for repairs to preserve aesthetic value. The *Pietà* was invisibly repaired after being damaged by a hammer-wielding madman in 1972, a repair that Lamarque claims was proper restitution for harm to its unique transcultural value. When a trio of porcelain vases were restored after accidentally being smashed to bits in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, Lamarque maintains that the result, while valuable, lacks the singular emotional and spiritual dimension of the *Pietà*. He observes that the vases are now admired *because* of their restoration, whereas the *Pietà* is admired *in spite of* its restoration (Lamarque, 2016 pp. 292–293).

Parker also emphasized the primacy of aesthetic value over relic value. One of history's most important book collectors, he had illuminators and bookbinders on his staff, and was perfectly willing to engage their services to improve his holdings. In a 1565 letter to Sir William Cecil, Parker remarks that Cecil's eighth-century Vespasian Psalter was missing one of the psalms. Parker writes, 'I was in mind to have caused Lylye to have counterfeited in antiquity, &c., but that I called to remembrance that ye have a singular artificer to adorn the same, which your honour shall do well to have the monument finished, or else I will cause it to be done and remitted again to your library' (Bruce and Perowne, 1853 letter CXCIV). So Parker was offering the use of his scribe Lylye to supply the missing psalm 'counterfeited in antiquity' unless Cecil wanted to use his own craftsman to do so. In the same letter, Parker also suggests moving a miniature of David with his harp from one location in the book to a more prominent one.

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Brandi focuses on the primacy of aesthetic value over practical value. He writes, 'yet for works of art, even if there are some that structurally possess a functional purpose (such as architecture, and, in general, objects of the so-called applied arts), the reestablishment of the functional properties will ultimately represent only a secondary or accompanying aspect of the restoration, never the primary or fundamental aspect that respects a work of art as a work of art' (Brandi, 1996).

But aesthetic value deserves a say beyond this fine parsing. To bind a book in a jewelled binding with silver chases, or in a Grolier-style binding that resembles a Persian carpet with elaborate multicoloured pieces of leather and flowing gilt curves, or in perfect medieval style with oak boards and brass clasps—that is to do it honour. It is to say to the book, to that copy, 'You matter to me, and I have done the very best for you that I know how to do'. If one takes an old car that has sat flat-tired under a tarp for forty years, and turns it into a Concours-level showpiece, that action elevates it from disintegrating junk into a treasure. The car may look better than new: the body gaps are tighter than when it rolled out of the factory, the chrome gleams like the sun, and the fresh paint shines with a gloss and depth it never had a half-century ago. Restorers who turn the dial on aesthetic value to the maximum aim to transfigure the profane—the rusted, mouldy, crumbling, torn, flaking, stained, neglected—into the sacred.

Option 3: Practical value is Most Important

Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc argues that all restoration must foreground the practical qualities of the object at hand, since these things 'actually have a purpose and in some way continue to be used, it is impossible to be merely a restorer of ancient dispositions that are no longer of practical use to anybody … too often archaeologists of a speculative bent fail to take such practical questions as these into account' (Viollet-Le-Duc, 1996, p. 317).

Just as restorers are able to increase an object's aesthetic value, they can also increase its practical value, even above what it possessed when new. Consider the restoration of an old house. Imagine an unmodified 200-year-old stone farmhouse with wide plank floors and exposed beams. It was originally lit with candles, probably had an outhouse, may not have had running water, and was heated by fireplaces. Should we install electricity, heating, plumbing? The old windows were single-glazed blown glass. Keep them? Put in storm windows? New double glazing to keep out draughts? The original interior walls were horsehair, lath, and plaster, with no insulation between them and the outer stone. Should they be replaced with modern drywall so we can get proper insulation behind for energy efficiency? What about other interventions like skylights (to improve interior lighting) or solar panels?

All of these possible alterations are meant to increase the home's practical value. They are not strictly necessary: the homeowner could choose to live with candles and hand-pumped water for cold baths. However, this choice makes the house less a home suitable for modern living and more a museum, an anachronism occupied by an eccentric. Viollet-le-Duc maintains that reconstruction needs to be done with superior materials in the style of the original, but in a way that maximizes its practical value; 'the best of

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all ways of preserving a building is to find a use for it' (Viollet-Le-Duc, 1996, p. 317). Viollet-le-Duc's ideas about prudential reconstruction to style are credited with saving many buildings and monuments that would have otherwise crumbled to ruin (Price et al., 1996, p. 312).

So far I have argued that the three salient forms of value in restoration are relic, aesthetic, and practical. I have also made the case that a restorer might plausibly defend any one of them as the most significant to be maximized, and have offered examples of defenders of each of these values as pre-eminent. Surely the ideal restoration would increase all forms of value, though, so why not (budget willing) maximize them all? The answer is because that is impossible.

8. Value Pluralism

The interaction among relic, aesthetic, and practical values resembles a three-body problem, and we should not expect some formulaic code of conduct that will tell us exactly what values to promote and when. Let us look more closely at a specific example to see how these come into conflict. Suppose a restorer is confronted with a first edition octavo set of John James Audubon's *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* (3 vols., 1859–1854). The original binding of this particular copy was half morocco. More exactly, it had a brown goatskin spine, the cover corners were in matching brown goatskin, and the boards were otherwise covered in marbled paper. The original binding was uninspired, with modest tooling and decoration. The leather was poorly made and has disintegrated at the joints resulting in the boards either becoming completely detached or coming off of all three volumes. The corners of the boards are somewhat banged and scraped. The *Quadrupeds* is admired for the 155 coloured plates of animals drawn by Audubon. Let us suppose that those are foxed and stained, but not horribly so. The paper used for the text leaves was typical low-grade mid-nineteenth century paper, and a few of the pages are torn without loss. What should be done?

One option is to do nothing to the books at all. Acid-free boxes could be made to hold the books, and they are left alone. This approach maximizes relic value: every last thing about the books is as original as possible: the headbands, the sewing, the glue, the leather. Even the old dust is undisturbed. Aesthetic value is at a minimum here, since a binding that is both unimpressive and dilapidated is not especially attractive. Practical value is also rather low; with the boards coming off, it makes looking at the volumes more difficult, and the torn leaves need unusual care.

A second option is to do a minimal restoration. The detached covers are reattached in the least obtrusive way possible, using new goatskin colour-matched to the original. The corners are stiffened up with glue, and the leather either replaced or treated to slow further decay. The torn leaves are invisibly mended with wheat paste and fibrous, gossamer-thin Japanese tissue. The present approach lessens the relic value, since we are adding new things to the books in the form of leather, glue, and Japanese paper. But the appearance of the set is improved, and its practical value is higher. Although care is still needed to read the books or look at the plates, they are not as frail as before.

A third option is to do a greater restoration, in which the books are completely pulled apart. The plates are washed to remove the foxing and stains, all tears are mended, and

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the books are resewn and re-glued along the spine. New two-colour silk endbands are sewn on in a period style. Then the books are recased into the original boards with new leather spines, titled in gold, and tooled in a period design. Greater restoration lessens the relic value even more, as more of the original binding is now gone and the age discoloration of the plates is removed. The aesthetic value is increased proportionately, with the plates now brighter and more attractive, and the bindings with greater shelf appeal. The new sewing and gluing means that the books are far sturdier and easy to read and examine, so practical value is substantially improved.

A fourth option is a full overhaul of the books. The binder dismantles the books completely, mends, washes, resews, and rebacks. If there are missing leaves, they are replaced with facsimiles. For a valuable set of books like *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, custom letterpress facsimiles on antique paper are ideal. Finally, the binder creates an entirely new binding. The new binding might be a replication of a period binding, that is, a traditional design that would have been in use in the mid nineteenth century when *Quadrupeds* was published. Or the binding might be a completely original artistic design of the binder that incorporates all kinds of exotic or fantastical and creative elements. There is still relic value here—the books remain authentic Audubon first editions. But there is nothing left of the original binding. However, the aesthetic value can be of the very highest quality, and far superior to the modest original work, even when it was new. The practical value is also high, as such a binding is as robust and tough as a new book. The only thing that still requires careful handling are the antique leaves themselves.

There is no recipe to decide which of these alternatives is the best, and they do not exhaust all possible options; they are merely the most prominent alternatives. A binder could guillotine the spine, take every page and plate and put them individually into mylar sleeves, and then into a three-ring binder.[9] All possible choices, including doing nothing, involve trade-offs among competing values. Which intuitively seems like the right way to go may simply be a result of background and training: conservators favour relic value with maybe a little sprinkling of practicality; craftsmen and tradeswomen reach for practical value first, although they are not averse to the others; artists of course see aesthetic value as the rightful ruler. Financial value is a function of the other three, fluctuates by social trends, and so cannot serve as a tiebreaker.

One might object that it is sometimes appropriate to restore a functional artefact in a cheap and ugly way, by reference to practical value and economic constraint and no other values. In such a case, there is no artistic choice at all. While it is certainly right that sometimes an artefact primarily valued for its usefulness might be restored in such a way, choices are still made. One imagines a frayed lamp cord that is repaired with electrician's tape, or a rusty barbecue grill that is amateurishly but effectively spot-welded together. In these cases, practical value triumphs over relic or aesthetic values. But even here, one can recognize that while the grill or lamp now work as intended, they would have looked nicer if the job had been professionally done. Aesthetic value is recognized

9 Something like this is the fate of Leonardo da Vinci's notebook known as *Codex Leicester*. It has been disbound, with each bifolium framed between glass panels. It is no longer a notebook at all.

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but downgraded. Likewise, there may be little relic value in a grill, but one can still acknowledge that it would have been better if it had original factory parts. In these humble examples other values are sacrificed for the practical; even when restorations face severe financial constraints or one value seems dominant, a broadly artistic choice is made.

The argument for pluralism may be summed up thus. Relic, aesthetic, and practical values are all genuine and legitimate values in restoration; financial value is a function of those three and cannot be considered on its own. It follows that to care for none of these values is the wrong way to conserve an object, and any restoration that promotes one of them is promoting a genuine and legitimate value. Furthermore, these values come in degrees—a thing can be more beautiful or less, more useful or less, more of a relic or less of one. There are many possible gradations and combinations. Since relic, aesthetic, and practical values cannot be simultaneously maximized in any concrete case of restoration (as the Audubon book case illustrates), any restoration will require selecting some balance of the three. None of that is to say that the values that a restorer deems as less important should be disregarded altogether. They still matter, and should be maximized to the extent compatible with the fundamental artistic choices, vision, and budget of the restoration.

Restorers and conservators can only tell us what can technically be done to conserve various aspects of an object that are of aesthetic, practical, or relic value. Then it will be up to relevant stakeholders to determine which of the technically possible treatments are optimal, by standards external to conservation as such. For example, what values does the owner of Audubon's *Viviparous Quadrupeds* primarily care about? Which of the four treatment options discussed above would she prefer? Are there broader cultural norms that should be brought into the conversation? Once these questions are answered, the binder can then use the appropriate techniques to advance the goals of the restoration.

According to Han, the Chinese tradition views objects as a process, each piece of art a palimpsest that changes and alters through time. There is a convention of the owners of paintings adding their own poetry to the canvas, along with their stamps and seals (Han, 2017, pp. 34–56). These additions do not mar the painting, but become part of a multiperson, multigenerational artistic conversation. While Han maintains that the idea of restoration, of peeling back the added layers to reach the original object, is a kind of falsification, it is more consistent to see restoration as merely the next stage of the thing. It is not diminishment, but just modification, and which modifications are the appropriate ones is an aesthetic judgement. Restorers battle an implacable enemy: entropy. But before their inevitable defeat, they can participate in the ongoing life of objects, by adding or preserving value in the way that seems best in their cultural moment: relic, aesthetic, or practical.

Pluralism about values does not mean anything goes. While every field has debates over the best approaches and techniques, there are plenty of things that are off the table. There are still standards of practice that must be mastered and respected, no matter which values are being optimized. You do not wash paper in Clorox. You do not use household epoxy on 3000–year-old funerary masks. You do not gild with fake gold. You do not touch up paintings with craft-store acrylic paint. You do not nail furniture back together. The basic injunction to restorers of art and artefacts is this: whether

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you are doing a minor repair or a major one, do it with the best materials and to the highest standard your skills allow. Also, know your limitations and opt out if a project is beyond your abilities. Once restoration has begun, however, there is no ahistorically perfect balance of relic, aesthetic, and practical values. There are many right mixes of these values, and, in the end, the decision is an artistic choice, not merely a matter of technique.

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