Chapter 10
Iconoclasm and Iconoclash – The Digital Restoration of the Movement-Image

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I. *Iconoclasm as a Means of Innovation and Reappraisal*

According to Boris Groys, iconoclasm acts as a mechanism of historical innovation and a means of reappraisal through a process involving the constant destruction and replacement of old values with new ones.[1] Iconoclastic action would thus be directed not only at the past, but also – indeed above all – at the present. In any case, in the first two decades of the 2000s, in "discontinuous continuity" with the 20th century, we evidence destructive gestures that focus on art as a political and aesthetic field where socio-cultural and economic tensions are expressed. There are many cases and manifestations of destructive actions that concern the present. In 2015, we saw the destruction of the works of Kader Attia, Daniel Buren, Leandro Erlich, Moataz Nasr, Pascale Marthine Tayou in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). These works are examples of 'silent' destruction, in addition to the suppressed project "Where is the Time?" by the Izolyatsia Foundation[2] in collaboration with the Galleria Continua (Italy) initiated in 2012 in Donetsk (Ukraine). In radically different contexts and circumstances, the destructive gestures of artists Blu and Banksy provoke attentional upheavals and participatory behaviour. Blu, in disagreement with the museum exhibition programme "Street Art. Bansky & Co – Art in the Urban State", erased his works from the walls of Bologna in 2016.[3] Blu's gesture, on the one hand, opposes that of detaching, from an urban territorial context, a wall on which a work of street art is impermanently traced in order to re-territorialise it in a museum context and, on the other hand, raises conservation issues. In turn, Bansky acted during an auction at

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1 Groys (2008).
2 https://izolyatsia.org/en/foundation.
3 The exhibition, curated by curators Luca Ciancabilla, Christian Omodeo and Sean Corcoran, ran at Palazzo Pepoli, Museum of the History of Bologna from 18 March to 26 June 2016.

Sothesby's in 2018, remotely activating an automatic device that, hidden in the casing/frame, dissected the hard copy of Girl with Balloon (2014) into vertical strips.[4] The work, a multiple, was one of the copies reproducing the mural created by Banksy in London in 2002. In both cases, the increase in cultural and economic valorisation triggers a crisis of the symbolic presence of the artistic sign in its visual evidence and in the materiality of its support and vector, making it necessary for the artists to make a destructive or, more precisely, an auto-destructive gesture.

Looking back at the 20th century, one can see how iconoclasm was brought *to* art and *into* art (in a trans-textual key through work on copies or reproductions). It is also clear that it was understood as a value/functional transformation that was an artistic practice. This was according to the *lignée L.H.O.O.Q.* "rectified ready-made", realised in 1919 by Marcel Duchamp, or according to that of the *tableau-piège* (trap painting) *Utiliser un Rembrandt comme planche à repasser (Marcel Duchamp)* realised by Daniel Spoerri in 1964 and referring to the Duchampian concept of "reciprocal ready-made". In other words, the aesthetic interference between the artistic and non-artistic dimensions of an object – natural or otherwise – stems from the practice of the artist who is capable of both changing the status of an ordinary object and of an artistic object. Thus, an ordinary object becomes a work of art and a work of art is transformed into an ordinary object that is usable, functionally adaptable, and exposed to destruction.

However, what is of interest here does not concern the repertoire of more or less contemporary iconoclasms, but rather the modulations of the iconoclastic gesture[5] in its *unconscious* variants, that is, the gesture that destroys not in its intent, but outcome.

One case among many is the work *Door: 11, rue Larrey Paris 1927* by Marcel Duchamp ("artistic regeneration" of a door of the flat where Duchamp had lived): during the preparation for the International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale in 1978,[6] the door was accidentally repainted by the painters of the Giorgione paint shop, who were maintaining the Italian Pavilion where the work was installed.[7] More recently, in

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4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxkwRNIZgdY.

5 Birnbaum (1997).

6 The theme of this Biennale, "Dalla natura all'arte e dall'arte alla natura" ("From nature to art and from art to nature"), engaged the curators Achille Bonito Oliva, Antonio del Guercio, Filiberto Menna and Jean Christophe Amman.

7 The destruction of the original varnish as well as the partial abrasion of the signature and the date caused damage to the work, resulting in monetary and

the context of "Street Noise", an exhibition at P/O/S/T, a gallery in Seoul's Lotte Street Mall, two young visitors interpreted the performance/installation work *Untiled* by artist JonOne as a work with a participatory character and, consequently, used the paints and brushes, conceived by the artist as compositional elements of the work, as tools to intervene, tracing marks[8] on the work itself. These are cases where the focus should not be on the institutional theory of art – which holds that art is a kind of thing whose existence depends on theories[9] – but on the unconsciously iconoclastic act where, due to context and circumstance, the eventuality of the "reciprocal ready-made" is not allowed. In any case, these are unintentional acts that impact the works "destructively" with consequences on their cultural transmissibility.

The question we want to raise is the following: In the field of art, can an act be destructive, constructive, conservative in and of itself, or rather, does it become historically so in relation to someone and something? But *when*? *How*? *Why*? According to what conception, idea, theory of *history* and *art history*? "Art", as we understand it, thought of as an "extended field"[10] and referring both to the movement of images[11] and to the technologically based moving image.

II. Iconoclasm and Iconoclash

According to Bruno Latour, "Icono*clasm* is when we know what is going on at the moment of destroying something and we know the motivations behind what seems to be a clear project of destruction. […] Icono*clash*, on the other hand, is when one does not know, or hesitates, or is at a loss when faced with an action for which there is no way of knowing, without further investigation, whether it is destructive or constructive."[12] Icono*clash* – a word composed of the two terms *icono* ("image", "icon")

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compensable damages. A long legal dispute ensued, which was only concluded in 2011, between the Fondazione Biennale di Venezia, the insurance companies, the Giorgione company and the owner of the work, the gallery owner/collector Fabio Sargentini, who had exhibited it at the L'Attico Gallery in Rome in November 1973.

8 https://abcnews.go.com/International/young-couple-mistakenly-vandalizes-440000 -painting-south-korea/story?id=76844914.

9 Dickie (1974) and (1997); Danto (1997); Genette (1994) and (1997).

10 Krauss (1979).

11 Michaud (2006) 26.

12 Latour (2002).

and *clash* – is the title of an exhibition curated by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, presented at the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe in 2002. The exhibition aimed to analyse "[...] only those places, objects or situations where there is an ambiguity, a hesitation, an iconoclash, about how to interpret the production and destruction of images". The intention was to "understand how the question of the construction/destruction of images is posed in the Western tradition"[13] by investigating, in the contemporary world, the *clash* on the status of images within the fields of art, science and religion. By "image", Latour means "[...] every sign, every work of art, inscription or material image [picture], which acts as a mediation to access something else".[14] And it is precisely the *image as mediation to access something else* that is the problem. On the other hand, from an anthropological perspective, Hans Belting believes that *mediation* implies a *medium* that is not immediately the image itself: "A medium is a form or transmits the very form in which we perceive the images. [...] The politics of image relies on their mediality [...]. The politics of images needs a medium to turn an image into a picture".[15] Belting therefore perceives the visibility of the image through a process of transformative mediation and transmission. The medium is the transmissive or host medium that images need for visibility.[16] According to Belting:

> "The link of physical images with the mental images into which we translate them may explain the zeal inherent in any iconoclasm to destroy physical images. The iconoclasts wanted to eliminate images in the collective imagination, but in fact they could destroy only their media. What the people could no longer see would, it was hoped, no longer live in their imagination. The violence against physical image served to extinguish mental images."[17]

This continues to apply to contemporary iconoclasm, which also aims to prevent the public "visibility" of images by activating a relationship between memory and the negation of the image. Think, for example, about the physical destruction of regimes' public sculptures in the former Soviet Union or Iraq. This use of visual media was designed to imprint themselves in the collective imagination. In this case we are faced with iconoclasm understood as a practice of symbolic liberation and as censor-

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13 Ibid. 300.
14 Ibid. 290.
15 Ibid. 305.
16 Belting (2002).
17 Belting (2005).

ship/erasure. The aim is to hide or destroy certain images in order to pro-tect others.[18] From this perspective, one can go into the "archaeology of hatred" expressed by Latour or observe the archive *at work* (*anarchive*) as defined by Jacques Derrida in *Mal d'archive*.[19] However, it is the icono*clash* that acts and reveals itself in the ambiguity between preservation and dele-tion, between preservation and loss, between protection and destruction of images on the levels of cataloguing/documentation/preservation/restora-tion after the "digital turn". While considering these plans in an interrelat-ed way – a fortiori for technologically based complex works (installation, multichannel, environmental and interactive) – the focus will be on digiti-sation processes affecting preservation and restoration practices of non-native digital single-channel film and video works.

III. Digital Preservation and Restoration

Digital preservation and restoration attempt the impossible task of coun-teracting the physical and chemical degradation of media (film or magnet-ic tape) and the obsolescence of reproduction tools. Thus, to make cultural transmission possible, it is necessary to separate the image from its original support through the digital scanning of the film, the digital reception of the electronic signal, and the transfer and transformation of the analogue into the computer domain. From an anthropological and technological perspective, this process evidences the dynamics of "survival" of contempo-rary images.

From the study of the "archives" of moving images and the decision-making models underlying restoration programmes, a risk emerges that concerns not simply the selection and elimination method, termed "cor-ruption", but the act which severs the relationship between the work and its historical-artistic context (*the relation between work and context*).[20] This is an iconoclash act because it implies the obliteration of the modes of reception and sensorium of a given historical moment. The emphasis on what becomes common in the modes of perception relates, in political and aesthetic terms, to the "medium" in Benjamin's sense. In the different ver-sions of the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility* (1935–36), the focus is on the historical variability of collective sensory per-

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18 Latour (2002) 328**.**
19 Derrida (1995).
20 Gamboni (1997).

ception. And what Walter Benjamin defines as medium is the place where the collective sensory perception historically finds organisation through a series of contingencies which, in modernity, concern technology, imply devices that function as instruments of mass communication.[21] This is the perceptive and constitutive dimension that history and time assign to a given work. However, it is not our time and history, but those in which the work was conceived/realised. In this sense, the work of preservation should include not only the preservation of the artistic *intentio* (the cardinal principle of restoration protocols), but also the forms of aesthetic experience and the modes of production/reception of the sensory context.

The current digital re-meditation of non-digital images in the social space occurs through multiple displays which are still experienceable, but also transformable.[22] This is because they imply the cancellation of the material and sensorial difference they carry.[23] Similarly, preservation and restoration interventions often remove differences (concerning materials, types of supports, formats and reproduction devices) since they support the digital "rebirth" of analogue images as "a reconfiguration of contemporary spectacular pleasure".[24] On the one hand, there is a colonisation process of the gaze and the "sensitive". On the other hand, there is an "icono-clash memory" justified by creative reuse, as a hypothetical valorisation of archive images. This is perhaps the case of the film *They Shall Not Grow Old* made in 2018 by Peter Jackson.

Evidently, there is not an awareness of acting on the concrete media historicity of moving images, invalidating them even in their quality of visual sources. In fact, they are historical sources which can be read from wide and multiple documentary perspectives.[25] Even the search for "original visual qualities" (an issue that would require new in-depth studies)[26] is likely to fall into the gravitational order of icono*clash* or the act of unconsciously destroying images in a sort of "benevolent vandalism". One thinks, for example, of the *effacing/embellishing* practices indulged in by certain digital

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21 Benjamin (1935/36, 2008).
22 Groys (2008).
23 Bellour (2012) 50.
24 Catanese (2013) 76, 82.
25 Marcenò (2008).
26 The concept of "*originale*" defines a quality referring to being "compatible" and "not equivalent to" the "*originaria*" version. Also, with respect to media provenance, this has to do with the documentary "integrity" of the work and the preservation of the modes of reception of the era in which the work was produced, as well as its aesthetic and cultural history.

restoration operations or the interventions made on the form and matter of the analogue image that betray a positivist and evolutionary-deterministic idea of technologies that can be summarised as follows: "In the past, if one could have had them, one would have used contemporary technologies". With statements of this kind, it is unclear what is being said and, above all, what one is doing. This is even though it is clear that in the processes of *preservation* and *restoration*[27] the digital remediation system (hardware and software devices) implies, in all its levels of application, many levels of transformation.[28]

The software automation should be the subject of further investigation. This "automation", in fact, erases defects or mechanical corruptions (stains, dust, scratches on the emulsion), imperfections, dulling, physical-chemical deterioration of the film (decomposition of the emulsion) or drop out, "speakle", and create impulsive noises of the magnetic tape etc. However, in doing so, they produce "artefacts" in the image, modifying its configuration. How to restore the material dimension (without avoiding comparison with the practices of Glitch Art)?

How to handle colour interpretation? How to prevent the software from deleting – as it does for defects – what appears as a light effect (shimmers, reflections, rapid movements) on a single frame? The automatic process, in fact, "provides that all extraneous elements, present in a single frame or with abnormal movement behaviour, are eliminated".[29] These are techniques for translating "figures" and "figural" aspects of the image that involve interdisciplinary knowledge, research and study.

Certain digital restoration operations, therefore, intervene on the form as well as the material of the analogue image. The criteria guiding the automatic correction process (embellishing), those orienting the restorer's eye (the human eye) and implying the tendencies of the spectator's taste define the aesthetic *koinè* of contemporary audio-visual languages. This is based on the icono*clash* gesture exercised through the computer application, "the digital". This is both a (transient) device of preservation (preser-

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27 A clarification of terminology: "Preservation" designates operations undertaken to protect the artifact that do not involve a "deliberate and radical" transformation of its "material appearance" and form (direct preservation; environmental preservation). The term "restoration", on the other hand, defines a type of programmatic intervention that introduces visible transformations. Preservation and restoration define the activity of conservation.

28 Saba (2013).

29 Catanese (2013) 98; Fossati (2018) 84.

vation and/or restoration) of delivery "to future memory", but also of re-programming[30] of the "digitised" works.

Evidently, direct conservation actions risk leading to a rather paradoxical situation whereby the digital restoration of the analogue moving image is pursued from an aesthetic point of view. Simultaneously, its historical dimension is systematically erased, as it is adapted (i.e., subjected to a principle of "assimilation") to the qualitative resolutions that are characteristic of contemporary digital images in the name of the "necessary" technological convergence of the media and the adaptive logic which convergence seems to require. On the one hand, the re-mediation system and protocols provide for the documentation of restoration processes and the reversibility and repeatability of the processes. On the other hand, however, computer tools automatically produce deletions or artefacts without a restorer's knowledge which results in consequences that are more destructive the more visually and sonically complex the moving image is.

For example, in the restored version of the film *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* (1968) by Carmelo Bene, the "black background" of some sequences, i.e., the black background that the actor's body emerges from, is an artefact of the re-editing system. Indeed, it erased the transparencies of the foreground/background relationship, the depth of field, the trajectories and the very dynamics of the camera movements. The results of the comparative tests for the definition of the digital restoration protocol of the film *We Can't Go Home Again* (1973) by Nicolas Ray[31] are differently exemplary (Figs. 1 and 2).

In these and other cases, in addition to defining the *text* of the *work*[32] to be preserved, restored and transmitted culturally (reference copy), the question of lost "information" produced through preservation and restoration practices arises. But how can analogue images be "saved" without indulging in the exhibition of the "patina", in the fetishism of the support – a support that cannot and must not be considered as *déchet*, an analogue waste – or, on the contrary, without exposing it to physical-chemical destruction?

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30 N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, Sternberg Press, London 2002.

31 Fossati (2018) 307–315.

32 The multidisciplinary methodology implies historical, semiotic, philological and analytical skills capable of restoring the "text" (*restitutio textus*) of the film work and, therefore, skills capable of reconstructing the production conditions (technological apparatus, executive techniques), the historical and cultural context, the modes of reception, the imaginaries, the ideologies, the optical unconscious.

Figs. 1 and 2: Comparison of the test results of workflow for the restoration of the film We Can't Go Home Again (1973), Nicholas Ray

It is no coincidence that artistic practices are also concerned with these issues. The physical-chemical ruin can take on an ecstatic/spectacular register, as for example in the short film *Stadt in Flammen* (1984, Super8, col., 5') by Schmelzdahin (Jochen Lempert, Jochen Müller and Jürgen Reble),[33] or it can take on a *mnestic/archival* value as in *Trasparenze* (1998, Hi8 video, col., sound, 6') by Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi. *Stadt in Flammen* is the outcome of a project in which a film (supporting a B-movie), unearthed from the garden after six months, was dissected into frames whose images, intensely attacked by bacteria, are assembled in a fractional montage (Fig. 3).
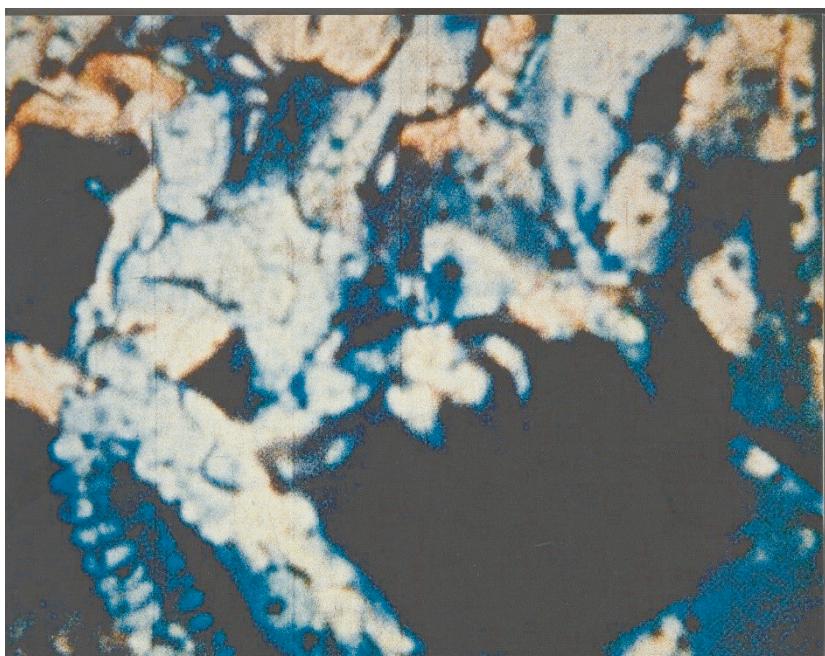

Fig. 3: Still of "Stadt in Flammen" (1984), Schmelzdahin

Trasparenze by Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi[34] began as a video letter (addressed to a friend) from the remains of a reel shot by Luca Comerio on Mount Adamello during World War I. It is a work about "self-deletion",

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33 http://www.schmelzdahin.de/stadtinflammenfilm.htm.
34 https://www.pinterest.de/pin/743938432187616615/.

a reflection on the decomposition of nitrate film, the erasure of images, and the chemical and historical amnesia of the archive. About ten years earlier, in 1986, this film material and the images inscribed in it had been used by Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi to make the war part of their film *Dal Polo all'Equatore*.[35] In the process of decomposition, the film, which could no longer be unwound, was transformed into a single block. The torn support, the fluorescence and the faded colours remain transparent until the images shot by Comerio were completely erased (Figs. 4 to 7).
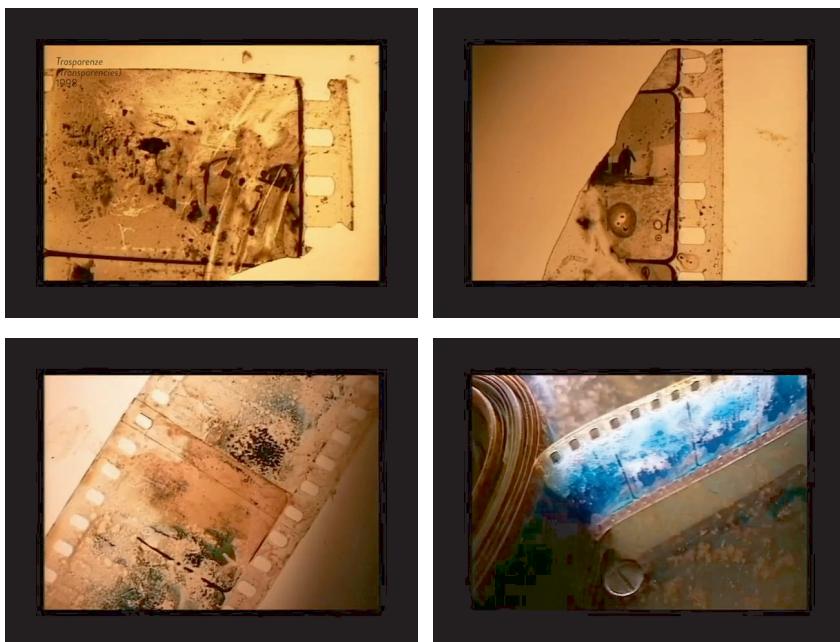
Figs. 4 to 7: Stills of Trasparenze (1998), Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi

IV. Provisional Conclusion

To conclude (on a provisional basis): What is no longer visible in the image and of the image is lost and erased. Our sensitivity to entropy attests to the fact that we cannot transform what is impermanent into something lasting. However, images never cease to bring out, aesthetically and histori-

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35 Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi (2014) 36.

cally, how we think, look and feel them and what, through them, we do beyond and against all our intentions, whether conscious or unconscious.

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Figs. 1–2:   Courtesy of the Nicholas Ray Foundation and Eye Filmmuseum

Fig. 3:   http://www.schmelzdahin.de/stadtinflammenfilm.htm

Figs. 4–7:   https://www.pinterest.de/pin/743938432187616615/