



PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

THE CONTROVERSIAL RESTORATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

A

Restoration begins with an apparent simplicity—repair what is damaged—but quickly becomes a philosophical puzzle. A monument or object is valued partly because it is physically continuous with the past, yet it is also valued because it *signifies* a past that audiences want to recognise. This creates a dilemma familiar from the “Ship of Theseus”: if worn stone, faded pigment, or missing timber is replaced in order to recover an earlier appearance, the object may become more legible but less materially authentic; if every scar is preserved, authenticity is protected but the work may become unintelligible or unstable. The paradox is sharpened by the fact that heritage is not only an artefact but a public claim about memory. Restoration therefore asks what should be preserved: original material, original intent, or the layered history of change.

B

Two nineteenth-century schools articulated the extremes. John Ruskin, writing against industrial modernity, argued that restoration is a form of destruction: once original fabric is replaced, the past has been falsified, and the work’s “age value” is lost. His preferred ethic was conservation in the strict sense—support what remains, but do not pretend to recreate what is gone. By contrast, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc defended reconstruction in the name of stylistic unity. For him, to restore a building was to return it to a coherent condition that it “may never have had” in one moment but that expressed the logic of its design. These positions still structure contemporary debate. Even when few conservators adopt either extreme, every project is pulled between them: the Ruskinian fear of counterfeit history and the Viollet-le-Duc ambition to make a work whole.

C

Cleaning controversies show how these arguments play out at the level of surface. Removing grime or varnish can reveal brighter colours and sharper contrasts, yet critics often claim that such interventions erase patina—those accretions of age that function as historical evidence. The disagreement is not simply about taste; it concerns what counts as “the work”. If darkened varnish is treated as pollution, then cleaning recovers the artist’s palette; if it is treated as part of the object’s biography, then cleaning becomes a form of iconoclasm against time itself. A further complication is uncertainty. Conservators rarely know exactly how a surface looked at the moment of completion, and the more an intervention aims for visual renewal, the more it risks substituting a present-day



preference for the past's ambiguity. In this sense, patina is not merely dirt; it is a record, and removing it can be interpreted as rewriting history.

D

Modern conservation often claims to escape such disputes through technical principles: minimal intervention and reversibility. Minimal intervention prioritises stabilisation—consolidating fragile paint layers, controlling humidity, repairing structural weakness—while avoiding additions that might mislead viewers. Reversibility is invoked as an ethical safeguard: if future knowledge improves, today's treatments can be undone. Yet reversibility is frequently an ideal rather than a fact. Adhesives penetrate porous materials; consolidants alter surfaces at the microscopic level; cleaning removes matter that cannot be replaced. Scientific tools—imaging, spectroscopy, 3D scanning—can diagnose condition with less physical intrusion, but they cannot decide whether a loss should be visually filled or left open. Technical evidence can show what pigments were used or where cracks are spreading, but it cannot settle the aesthetic judgement about how much “wholeness” is permissible.

E

Reconstruction becomes most contentious when heritage is also an economic asset. Cities rebuild gates, façades, or entire districts to attract visitors and to project continuity after war or disaster. Techniques such as anastylosis—reassembling a structure from original fragments—are often presented as rigorous, yet even they require interpretation when pieces are missing or context is uncertain. The tourist gaze rewards completeness: a seamless wall photographs better than a fragment supported by scaffolding. But the appearance of completeness can harden conjecture into apparent fact, especially when plaques and guidebooks present a single narrative. Reconstruction can thus create a “false clarity” in which what is unknown is quietly replaced by what is plausible. The risk is not only academic. Once a rebuilt form becomes iconic, it can shape identity and policy, making later correction politically difficult even if new evidence emerges.

F

Questions of authority further complicate the picture, particularly in contexts shaped by colonial histories. Many objects and sites carry sacred, communal, or spiritual meanings that are not reducible to material preservation. A restoration funded and directed by outside institutions may impose aesthetic integrity as the dominant value, while local communities prioritise ritual use, continuity of custodianship, or restrictions on display. Debates over who may handle, clean, or even photograph a sacred object reveal that “expertise” is not only technical but also social. Increasingly, the language of stewardship replaces older notions of ownership: the past is something held in trust, requiring



consultation, consent, and sometimes the acceptance that not all heritage should be made fully visible to outsiders. In such cases, restoration is inseparable from power—who defines authenticity, and whose losses and meanings count.

G

New pressures and technologies are reshaping these choices. Climate change threatens sites through flooding, wildfire smoke, salt intrusion, and temperature extremes, pushing conservators toward triage: rapid risk reduction aimed at survival rather than perfect documentation. At the same time, digital tools promise a way to separate interpretation from material intervention. High-resolution scanning can create digital twins that preserve form and surface detail, while projections and augmented reality can display hypothetical reconstructions without repainting or rebuilding. Yet digital heritage raises its own authenticity problem. If visitors primarily experience overlays and simulations, the “real” object may become a backstage prop for a more compelling virtual narrative. The future of conservation may therefore involve an uneasy compromise: accepting some material loss as inevitable, while using digital means to communicate multiple possibilities transparently. Controversy will remain, not because conservators lack skill, but because heritage carries competing values that no single treatment can reconcile.

Questions 27–30

Select the correct answer.

27 What is the central paradox of restoration described in the first paragraph?

- A** Restorations should always privilege tourism over scholarship
- B** Scientific testing can prevent any disagreement about authenticity
- C** Preserving physical fabric can conflict with restoring recognisable appearance
- D** Heritage debates are mainly caused by a lack of technical expertise

28 Why does the passage suggest that the principle of “reversibility” is often idealistic?

- A** Because reversible treatments are illegal in many countries
- B** Because some treatments permanently change materials and cannot truly be undone
- C** Because reversibility requires that missing parts be fully reconstructed
- D** Because reversibility prevents conservators from using scientific tools

29 What limitation of scientific analysis in conservation is highlighted?

- A** It cannot detect previous repairs beneath a surface.
- B** It always produces misleading results in art objects.
- C** It removes the need for stabilisation work on fragile materials.
- D** It provides diagnostic evidence but cannot settle aesthetic judgement.



30 What risk associated with architectural reconstruction is emphasised?

- A** Conjecture can become accepted as factual history when reconstructions look complete.
- B** Reconstruction cannot occur unless every original fragment survives intact.
- C** Reconstruction usually makes buildings less attractive to visitors.
- D** Reconstruction eliminates the need for documentation and explanation.

Questions 31–35

Choose **YES** if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer, choose **NO** if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

31 The passage implies that the 19th-century critic John Ruskin supported aggressive restoration of decaying buildings.

32 The passage suggests that the removal of surface “patina” can be interpreted as a loss of historical evidence.

33 The passage states that private donors generally prefer reconstruction over stabilisation projects.

34 The passage argues that digital reconstructions offer a complete emotional substitute for the physical object.

35 The passage indicates that future conservation may use digital methods to present multiple possible interpretations transparently.

Questions 36–40

Complete the summary below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

Principles and challenges of conservation

Contemporary conservation often adheres to the principle of **36**, prioritising stabilisation over renewal. Although science aids diagnosis, it cannot resolve complex **37**, When missing parts are rebuilt, there is a danger that **38** may be mistaken for fact. Increasingly, older notions of ownership are being replaced by the language of **39** High-resolution scanning can create **40** that preserve form and surface detail.

Answer Key



27. C

28. B

29. D

30. A

31. NO

32. YES

33. NOT GIVEN

34. NOT GIVEN

35. YES

36. minimal intervention

37. aesthetic judgement

38. conjecture

39. stewardship

40. digital twins