PERFORMANCE

THE ETHICS AND THE POLITICS OF CONSERVATION AND CARE, VOLUME I

Edited by
Hanna B. Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman
and Emilie Magnin

Performance

This book focuses on performance and performance-based artworks as seen through the lens of conservation, which has long been overlooked in the larger theoretical debates about whether and how performance remains.

Unraveling the complexities involved in the conservation of performance, *Performance: The Ethics and the Politics of Conservation and Care* (vol. 1) brings this new understanding to bear in examining performance as an object of study, experience, acquisition and care. In so doing, it presents both theoretical frameworks and functional paradigms for thinking about—and enacting—the conservation of performance. Further, while the conservation of performance is undertheorized, performance is nevertheless increasingly entering the art market and the museum, meaning that there is an urgent need for discourse on how to care for these works long-term. In recent years, a few pioneering conservators, curators, and scholars have begun to create frameworks for the long-term care of performance. This volume presents, explicates, and contextualizes their work so that a larger discourse can commence. It will thus serve the needs of conservation students and professors, for whom literature on this subject is sorely needed.

This interdisciplinary book implements a novel rethinking of performance that will challenge and revitalize its conception in many fields, such as art history, theater, performance studies, heritage studies and anthropology.

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Hanna B. Hölling is a Research Professor and Principal Investigator at the Bern University of Applied Sciences—Academy of the Arts, where she leads two projects funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. She is also an Honorary Fellow in the Department of History of Art at University College London (UCL). Prior to her current roles, Hanna was Associate Professor in the Department of History of Art at UCL, where she specialized in the History of Art, Media and Technology. She also served as a Mellon Visiting Professor for Cultures of Conservation at the Bard Graduate Center in New York. Hanna received her doctorate from the University of Amsterdam (2013). She has also held the position of Head of Conservation at the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany. Hanna is the author of several monographs, including *Paik's Virtual Archive: On Time, Change and Materiality in Media Art* (University of California Press, 2017) and *Revisions—Zen for Film* (Bard Graduate Center, 2015). Additionally, she has edited anthologies such as *The Explicit Material: Inquiries on the Intersection of Curatorial and Conservation Cultures* (with Francesca Bewer and Katharina Ammann; Brill, 2017) and *Object—Event—Performance: Art and Materiality since the 1960s* (Bard Graduate Center, 2022).

Kongo Astronauts is an artist collective based in Kinshasa, founded in 2013 by Michel Ekeba and Eléonore Hellio. Their multi-media practice includes photography, film, sculpture, and performance, and engages with Kinshasa's

alternative culture network. Through the lens of Afrofuturism, they explore the multilayered cultural, political, and environmental histories of the Congo and its exploitation to reconsider its present. Integral to their practice are the "astronaut suits" worn by Ekeba, which are built from used and discarded electronics. Kongo Astronauts are interested in the creation of works that sometimes might be difficult to classify, works whose forms might be ephemeral or unstable, works which generate attitudes and processes, works which respond to a place or a context, given or constructed. They describe their own practice as "an attempt to resist the psychic ghettos that cover multiple postcolonial realities." Other participants include Bebson Elemba, Céline Banza, Amourabinto Lukoji and Daniel Toya.

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Emilie Magnin is currently a PhD candidate within the Swiss National Science Foundation research project *Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge* at the Bern Academy of the Arts. Her research focuses on the institutional changes prompted by the increasing acquisition of performance

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Valerian Maly is a performance artist, lecturer and head of the performance art department at the MA CAP at the Bern Academy of the Arts. He acts as a curator of performance-based projects and exhibitions. For over thirty-six years, Maly has lived and worked with Klara Schilliger with whom he has created intermediary and mostly site- and situation-specific performances and installations (often called InstallActions). The duo has lived and worked in Lucerne, Cologne, Bern and La Chaux-de-Fonds. In 2008, they were awarded the Art Prize of the municipality of Berne. In 2016, they were elected to the International Artists' Committee IKG, which, analogous to the PEN Club, campaigns for freedom of art, cultural self-determination, tolerance and cultural diversity. In the late 1970s, as a cultural producer, Maly founded the film, video and performance festival VIPER. He was artistic director of several festivals, such as Pfeifen im Walde in Berlin (1994), Lucerne Festival (1997), the palindromic festival "emit time" at the Freie Akademie Bern (2002) and the performance art festival BONE (2011-2017). Maly initiated and co-curated two exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Bern: Terry Fox: Elemental Gestures (2017) and République Géniale after Robert Filliou (2018).

Hélia Marçal is a lecturer, researcher, and conservator based in London. She is Lecturer in Art, Materials, and Technology at University College London's Department of History of Art, having previously worked as a Fellow in Contemporary Art Conservation and Research of the Andrew W. Mellon funded research project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum at Tate (2018–2020). She has been the Coordinator of the Working Group on Theory, History, and Ethics of Conservation of the International Council of Museums' Committee for Conservation since 2016. She received her doctorate from NOVA University of Lisbon and has published various articles and book chapters on conservation theory and ethics, conservation of time-based media and performance art, embodied memories and the body-archive, and participation and stewardship of cultural heritage. Her recent book project explores posthuman ethics in museums.

Megan Metcalf is an art and dance historian who brings a practitioner's perspective to scholarly research, combining work in institutional and personal archives with a background in dance and choreography. She received her PhD in contemporary art history from the University of California, Los

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Dread Scott is a multimedia artist based in Brooklyn. His first major work, *What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag* (1988), made while he was a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, became the center of controversy, denounced as a desecration of the American flag by then-President G.H.W. Bush and outlawed by Congress. His work—in installation, photography, screen-printing, video and performance—addresses historical and contemporary injustice and inequality. For his 2019 *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, Scott staged a reenactment of the 1811 German Coast Uprising, the largest revolt of enslaved people in U.S. history. His art has been exhibited at such institutions as MoMA/PS1, The Walker Art Center, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and Kunsthal KAdE (Amersfoort, Netherlands). He is a recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, a United States Artists Fellowship and a Creative Capital grant. His work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum and The National Gallery of Art.

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Introduction

Caring for performance

Hanna B. Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman and
Emilie Magnin

Can performance be conserved, and if so, how? And what does it *mean* to conserve performance? Performance works—ephemeral, sensitive to site, embedded in history and often tied to the body of the artist—have long been considered beyond the reach of conservation and restoration, which have traditionally focused on objects, rather than moving bodies. And yet, situating conservation next to performance offers an intriguing point of entry for theoretical and practical investigations. Examined through the lens of conservation, what *is* performance, and what might it become? What might this new disciplinary lens reveal about performance—and what about conservation? As an evolving practical-theoretical paradigm and a way of theorizing and bringing objects to conscious attention, how does conservation itself change vis-à-vis these new "objects"? Is conservation sustainable, as an imperative, principle and category, or do performative works necessitate distinct modalities of care? Our book begins with these questions. The authors in this volume investigate performance and performance-based artworks (henceforth abbreviated to "performance") as material and conceptual entities through the lens of conservation.[1] Employing diverse disciplinary, professional and personal perspectives, they both set and examine the conditions of possibility for the continuation of performance works.

Being of limited duration and involving human and non-human bodies, performance challenges the common assumptions that a work of art can be fixed, static and "conservable"—an object easily constrained by established systems of documentation and archival powers. Because performance often refuses any enduring material manifestation, to pursue its conservability may seem paradoxical. Moreover, the relatively short temporal timeframe in which performance materializes is complicated by the very notion of traditional conservation. Accustomed to perpetuating object-based artworks, traditional conservation has too often disregarded the intangible aspects of heritage conveyance: the transmission of memory, skill, technique and knowledge that are crucial to the sustenance of performance. Indeed, Western institutions of art and culture have long discredited or actively suppressed the practices of oral history, body-to-body transmission and ritual inheritance that are so crucial to performance's longevity.

Yet at the same time, as contemporary art has grown to require more complex care, conservation has also grown as a discipline, developing new discourses and

practices that revise, expand and sometimes fundamentally reconceptualize the conservator's role. Conservation has become an intellectual endeavor, a way of theorizing objects and bringing them to conscious attention. Most importantly, conservation provides valuable theoretical and practical tools for approaching the most intractable challenges raised by performance and its afterlives. In that sense, the book aims to promote the critical-reflective approach of conservation that has long been overlooked in the larger theoretical debates concerning whether and how performance remains.

The scholars, curators, artists and practitioners gathered here explore the forms and modalities of documentation and the intricacies of building, systematizing, creating and accessing the archive; material and objectual residues such as props, remains, relics and technical apparatuses of performance; and the transmission of varying forms of knowledge—*a priori* and *a posteriori*, embodied and immaterial, experiential, empirical and abstract, situated and collective. Through dialogues, interviews, research and practice both inside and outside museums, the contributors address how performance works are "cared for," documented, and continued by both established and emerging stewards.

The volume originated in the project Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation at the Bern University of Applied Sciences—Academy of the Arts (2020–2024).[2] The project has assembled a network to debate the ideas of the conservability of performance through annual colloquia and research meetings with scholars across multiple disciplines as well as practicing performers in visual and performing arts. We would like to acknowledge the way in which their presence in the project and generosity in sharing knowledge and discussing have contributed to the kind of thinking pursued in this book.[3]

Emerging from not entirely unprepared grounds,[4] the book reacts to the urgent necessity for conservators to access and deepen this area of study on the one hand, while, on the other, to offer knowledge derived from conservation to scholars of other disciplinary fields. The book situates conservation in dialogue with other human sciences—art history, philosophy, sociology, performance and museum studies—to broaden and deepen knowledge about performance. It aims to promote the critical-reflective approach of conservation that has long been overlooked in the larger theoretical debates concerning whether and how performance remains.

In this book, we situate objects (e.g. conservation's objects and tools) and humans (e.g. conservators, custodians and other stakeholders) in an active agential network of co-dependencies and co-constitution, rather than subordinating one to the other (e.g. objects to humans according to the Enlightenment tradition). Following philosopher Jane Bennett's political ecology and ideas derived from new materialisms, which are echoed in several chapters of this volume, things, just like humans, are considered vibrant materialities that have the capacity for their own tendencies, propensities and trajectories.[5] Here, it is not only conservation that constitutes its objects; objects, too, co-constitute conservation.

We adopt seeing as something that we *do*, rather than an obscure, passive process.[6] We can only see against the background of our knowledge and skills,

and in the social-cultural environment in which we are situated.[7] Thus inter-acting with the new active and acting, agential objects, we might find ourselves being instructed as to what these objects *want*. Confronted with objects that dictate their conditions of care, we must not only revise the principles of our professional ethics, but also our behaviors as carers.

What is called caring?[8]

In the common sense, "caring" means to tend to others, or to demonstrate kindness and concern.[9] Assuming vulnerability as a constant, caring is an interactive process that unfolds itself in the relationship between the carer and the cared for. Today's care ethics, exemplified by writer-activists like Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and the Care Collective, is indebted to the pathbreaking work of scholars of feminism and disability. Among many others, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Selma Sevenhuijsen and Joan Tronto argued for the critical necessity of care not only interpersonally but also as a funda-ment of institutions and systems.[10] For Bernard Stiegler, care encapsulates the theme of "thinking care-fully,"[11] an imperative for co-habitation with other beings. Caring is, if pursued ethically, a continuous, rather than intermittent, activity, not only a reaction to acute injury or illness but a foundation of well-being that requires constant tending.

The cultivation of care might mean a care-*full* cultivation of material actancy that implicates our acquiescence to how artworks and objects dictate their conditions of care. Because for Stiegler, the very act of thinking might "start to understand itself as caring," we might go as far as to say that knowledge, as a materialization of thinking, is care. Care would then signify an engagement with and attentiveness to the apparatus of knowledge—the ethics and mechan-ics of knowledge advancement, production and dissemination (a book being one example). But how might we *perform* conservation as an ethics of care while conserving performance?

In 2020, the Baltimore Museum of Art caused an uproar when it announced that it would devote funds earmarked for "collection care" to raising staff salaries, part of a commitment to paying every employee a living wage.[12] Many objected that the latter concern, however admirable, should not be confused or connected with the maintenance of works of art. Yet especially as conservation relies increasingly on expanding networks of artists, performers, witnesses and a range of other profes-sional and nonprofessional individuals—as addressed in many of the contributions in this volume—care for human beings becomes increasingly difficult to disen-tangle from the care of artworks.

To understand and cultivate care as an advanced conservation is to parse performance as a product of this social-cultural entanglement, engaging ecolo-gical—rather than holistic—thinking that goes beyond the principles of object conservation. Only in this way might conservation start to understand itself within a wider ethic of care, a transindividualizing relationship between the

carer and the cared for, a relational ethics and context-bound approach toward morality, response-ability and decision making.

Continuing performance

Knowledge about performance is contingent on mediation through bodily transmission, oral accounts and diverse forms of written narratives, including instructions, scores and notations, that are mirrored in the photographic and moving image documentation of the twentieth century. There is no hope of summarizing the entire history of performance in this space, but it is worthwhile to establish, however incompletely, the genealogies at issue here. In the tradition of the visual arts, "performance art" is often seen to begin with the Futurist and Dadaist movements of the beginning of the twentieth century, though the experiments of the Gutai group and the "Happenings" of Allan Kaprow asserted a new, more powerful role for performance within the artistic avant-garde. In the 1970s, the various action, movement and body-based practices that artists had begun to develop were understood to comprise a new genre, despite their great diversity.

Pioneers of performance—to mention just a few of the most influential tendencies and practitioners—sought to extend and subvert the practices of dance (as in the work of Trisha Brown, Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer), theater (Jack Smith, Richard Foreman, Judith Malina), and music (Laurie Anderson); to dismantle boundaries between art and life, as in Fluxus events; and to catalyze audiences with ritualistic actions, as in the performances of Hermann Nitsch, Rafael Montañez Ortiz and Carolee Schneemann. They have performed acts of extreme endurance (Marina Abramović, Ron Athey, Chris Burden, Tehching Hsieh, Zhang Huan), political theater (Joseph Beuys, Graciela Carnevale, Milan Knížák), and conceptual curiosity (Yves Klein, Yoko Ono). Performance artists like Valie Export, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, David Hammons, Ana Mendieta and Adrian Piper have laid bare fundaments of community and identity within the public sphere—while others, like Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci, have explored private concepts and compulsions.

In short, as the diverse practices and perspectives sketched above demonstrate, performance can take a variety of shapes and forms, acting in between media and borrowing elements from other art forms and thus complicating (modernist) discourses of media purity and specificity. Performance can involve an individual action of an artist or of a group of artists in a given place and at a given time, and might form and rely on a relationship between the audience and the performers. Performance claims to center the body more insistently than other media, whether as aesthetic category or physical engine, and can be spectacle and/or lens-based.[13]

Performance complicates not only the concept of time as permanence, but also notions of individual authorship, intentionality and authenticity. Moreover, it upsets the traditional aesthetic position that an artwork is self-contained and self-sufficient, and that its identity might be conveyed by its singular materialization.

In its immediacy, performance is the most direct way of experiencing art. By means of its ubiquitous activation of all the senses and the elevation of the viewer to a condition of participation, performance achieves instantaneous presence. It is often led by chance and contingency, i.e. by the accidents of its actions and settings. It follows that the creation of any common strategy regarding the "treatment" of performance, whether intellectual or practical (or the creation of a "conservation treatment" for that matter), remains impossible. Generally, four modalities are in play for the potential existence of performance after the act: reenactment or reperformance, the conservation of residual objects, the verbal or bodily transmission of knowledge, and various types of documentation.

The objectification of live events and presence—whether via performance relics or reperformance—has been harshly criticized by artists, critics and scholars who insist on performance's resistance to museum and market.[14] Reenactments of performances from the 1960s and '70s—freshly subject to both historicization and nostalgia—allow these works to be projected not only into museum spaces, but also into the art histories they shape.[15] Reenactments raise pressing questions. Performance's vicinity to theater legitimizes the possibility of its repetition—whether by the artist herself, her descendants, or by other performers—while it also conflicts with the common interpretation of a performance as an authentic, unrepeatable moment.

Given art history's continued focus on the material, performances are often left to endure in the residual objects—often costumes, props, stage sets or images and text created for or during the performance—that remain after the act. These are generally understood to require preservation in their original, authentic condition—a view that reflects traditional conservation's tenet about keeping artworks as unchanged material objects. The transmission of knowledge, whether oral or bodily, is often crucial in sustaining performance, both within the art world and far beyond it, such as in ritual dances and processions. Yet such transmission, resistant to extra-bodily materiality, requires a shift in mentality away from the object-centrism characteristic of collecting institutions.[16] Now as before, the documentation of performance—films, texts, scripts, scores, oral histories and witness reports—remains crucial. Documentation not only registers interactions between the work and the viewer and anchors the unstable event in time, but also performs an instructive, educative and authoritative function that might also inform the performance's future actualization.

These strategies, based in live transmission, traditional object conservation, or documentation, evolve around what might be named the *changeability* of performance. A performance's changeability, its constant fluctuations between ontologically distinct events, objects and residues, and between gestures and documentation, poses questions about the persistence of the artwork's identity through change.[17] Are filmic and written documentation, scripts, scores, oral histories and witness reports—still the most common means for sustaining performance—sufficient for securing its future? How do technological obsolescence, the ageing of storage media (film, video, photography and software) and their accompanying processes of migration, emulation and reinterpretation

already alter what they meant to capture objectively and durably in the first place? If the work exists in multiple manifestations and to the same extent in props, leftovers and relics as well as in oral narratives, memories and knowledge (both tacit and explicit), what does this mean for its conservation, and how does it matter? In what follows, we first provide a short theoretical overview of how performance has been conceptualized since the late twentieth century, to later shed some light on the question of its conservation, contextualized within the debates surrounding the conservation of recent art.

Theorizing performance

Much of the theorization of performance and its afterlife has sharpened itself against Peggy Phelan's insistence on performance's irrevocable ephemerality: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."[18] Her argument has had three profound implications: Performance has been understood as fundamentally ephemeral and as only imperfectly to be captured by documentation, while its disappearance is postulated as an aesthetic and political necessity. Yet this argument also establishes two fundamental conditions for the preservation of performance that are at the center of both conservation theory and practice: the inevitability of change and the lack of identity between a performance and its documentation.

Many scholars, critics and artists have worked against the notion that performance expires. The hierarchy of performance and documentation has been complicated by Amelia Jones and Philip Auslander, who argued that photographic documentation might be just as valid an experience of a work as the performance (Jones), or even fundamentally constitute it as such (Auslander).[19] Against Phelan's insistence on disappearance, Rebecca Schneider has theorized about, and argued that, "performance remains" through ritual repetition and citational acts.[20] If we shift the vantage point, as the performance scholar Gabriella Giannachi suggested, "from the historical live event to its mediation and transmission,"[21] the primacy of the event recedes and might give way to the view of the historical event as something that, according to Christopher Bedford, "splinters, mutates, multiplies over time infinitely in the hands of various critical constituencies in a variety of media"—a viral ontology of performance.[22]

The rejection of text and concrete archive as authoritative has been important to the exploration of performance itself as a form of record, as in the work of Diana Taylor, who distinguishes between the bureaucratic, colonially-imposed "archive" and the Indigenous, embodied "repertoire."[23] The repertoire figures performance's endurance both in and through the bodies that learn, enact and transmit it. Such processes are to be found not only in anthropological studies of how ritual is passed from one generation to the next—as in Shadreck Chirikure's contribution to this book—but also in the workings of

institutional memory that allow artworks with performative or ephemeral elements to be resurrected in museum spaces. Whether from institutional or bodily spaces, the actualization of performance is, according to André Lepecki, never fixed in the original possibilization, but it becomes unlocked in many virtual possibilities, and driven by a will to reenact.[24]

The theorization of performance—specifically, the possibility of seeing performance as a sustainable, conservable medium, genre, or activity—is by no means limited to the discipline of art history. Since the 1970s, the deliberately hybrid field of performance studies has brought together theater, folklore, ritual and art in pursuit of a greater understanding of and critical perspective on performance's substance. Richard Schechner, a founder of performance studies, introduced the idea of "twice-behaved behavior," arguing that performance essentially has no original, is always already a repetition.[25] Schechner's theory deprives conservation of a central assumption, though one that has long been recognized as unstable: that of an "original" version of a given artwork, which can in theory be regained through the techniques of restoration. Fred Moten's theorization of improvisation as a leitmotif of Black culture allows for an understanding of creativity, adaptation and change as necessary ingredients for—rather than impediments to—a sustained, living performance tradition[26]— something at the core of Black radical performativity, as Kelly Morgan attests in her conversation with us.

Musealizing performance

Today, the ubiquitous presence of performance in museum exhibitions, festivals, art fairs and as spontaneous events forces us to consider ways in which performance can be perpetuated and conserved. Not only have numerous institutions, museums and galleries begun to incorporate performance in their programs, but, crucially for conservation, performance has also begun to be collected alongside traditional media like painting and sculpture. The institutionalization of performance—its commissioning, acquisition, registration, exhibition, conservation, loaning and archiving—changes it.[27] These processes transcribe and remediate performance works into forms that can be ingested by existing museum apparatus. Museums' increased interest in exhibiting and collecting performance is part of a major shift in their practice and mission. Increasing interest in performance accompanies greater attention to audiences and more resources devoted to special events and time-based projects.

Performance's challenge to the museum distinguishes itself from classic models of institutional critique in that it is not necessarily museums' politics, but rather their operating structures and bureaucracies that are put under pressure. Tino Sehgal is a salient and oft-discussed boundary case for performance's collision with standard museum practices: the meaning of his lyrical performances is indivisible from the conditions placed on their acquisition. He insists that museums abstain from digital, paper, or other records of his works, save for the memories of museum staff.[28] Yet while one might expect these

daunting conditions to hamper their institutional acquisition, Sehgal is among the best-collected of contemporary performance artists, and his work has become indispensable to any discussion of the conservation or musealization of performance.[29] Yet it remains to be seen whether the novel approaches to Seghal's art will remain tethered to it, a quirk specific to this artist rather than a method that might be applied to others. In the process of institutionalization, will performances remain the exception, or will they generate new rules? Reconciling museum processes for performance might entail making space for practice and rehearsal within the museum; having movement artists on staff as keepers—learners, transmitters and performers—of performative works; and close collaboration between curators and conservators. And it is from conservators that some of the most radical proposals and revolutionary approaches have emerged.

Conservation of performance as conservation of contemporary art

The conservation of performance is embedded in, and indebted to, broader discourses in the conservation of contemporary art and in the theory of conservation. As a practical and discursive field, contemporary art conservation has produced a number of ambitious and enlightening reference works that are relevant to the conservation of performance, including on the topics of installation art, media art and the so called "time-based media," digital art and kinetic works.[30] Along (and at times within) these writings, and accompanied by a solid number of symposia and colloquia,[31] there developed a contemporary conservation theory which has had a major impact on the way that conservation is practiced. One of the observations that has been made in this context is that the scientific freeze paradigm, and by extension, the use of science to scrutinize and stabilize truths about objects, may no longer be applicable to works created post-1960. The formulation *freeze-frame paradigm* refers to the conservation of an artwork based on scientific analysis (and not on truths derived from phenomenological awareness and interpretation); similarly, *freeze strategies* express the traditional understanding of an artwork as "locked in time."[32] While it might be claimed that the scientific paradigm—and the belief in science as a conveyer of truth—might still be applied to modern painting and sculpture, works that are iterant, transitional and performative require a conceptual approach that combines values based conservation with other forms of knowledge derived from the humanities and social sciences.

Performance posits a fundamental challenge to many core tenets of conservation work by denying the primacy of the object. Although object-independent thinking in conservation might be traced back to the Variable Media Approach (2003),[33] one of the most significant departures from object-centrism and its associated ideas of originality and material authenticity was the biographical approach drawn from Igor Kopytoff's "cultural biography."[34] With important implications for performance conservation, this approach postulates that the meaning of an object and the effects it has on people and events may

change during its existence, due to changes in its physical state, use and social, cultural and historical context.[35] The concept of the biography enables us to construct artworks' "lives" as individual trajectories that might, or might not, demonstrate a similar pattern of change.

Rather than preserving original objects, then, the conservation of contemporary art is thought of as managing change—an idea most prominently inscribed into the conservation scholarship by Pip Laurenson.[36] Applying ideas from the philosophy of music and analytical philosophy, Laurenson has argued for a rethinking of the notion of the authentic in relation to works which are based on a score or instruction and might be thickly or thinly described.[37] Ideals of authenticity and originality began to give way to theoretical considerations of iteration and difference, such as in Tina Fiske's iterability and "ethics of otherness," as models to provide conservation with an alternative approach to the recreation of installations.[38] In light of these developments, conservation has evolved past the idea of prolonging its objects' material lives into the future and become "an engagement with materiality, rather than material—that is, engagement with the many specific factors that determine how objects' identity and meaning are entangled with the aspects of time and space, the environment, ruling values, politics, economy, conventions and culture."[39]

From managing change to the understanding of all works as having durations—whether short or long—we come to the understanding of artworks as tethered not only to a specific materiality, but also to a specific temporality. That we experience works even of bronze and stone as eternally stable, continuous with the past moment in which they were made, is an illusion. What was once considered as an enduring, quasi-stable object, with determinable, often singular author and origins might in this light become a slowly unfolding event—something that ages and acquires patina. Performances and events might be understood to exist in a potentially infinite number of instantiations, untethered to a specific temporality, and be reperformable.

As Hölling has shown elsewhere, the materiality of artworks is temporal and relational, a web of inter- and intra-dependencies that can be approximated through the lens of new materialisms and ecological thinking in which the conservation of performance is firmly situated through the recent contributions to the field (notably Hélia Marçal's).[40] These ideas follow upon the "social turn" in conservation theory, with its early manifestations in the conservation of so-called ethnographic collections via the scholarship of Miriam Clavir,[41] and their later enunciation in Salvador Muñoz-Viñas's *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (2005).[42] Muñoz-Viñas posits conservation as a subjective and interpretational process, and the conservator as someone who impacts and changes the work. No longer understood as a "passive custodian,"[43] the conservator today is aware of her interpretative power and serves, according to Paul Eggert, "as a competing and complementary authorial (or editorial) agency" who affects our understanding of the concept of the work.[44]

Finally, the consideration of time might allow us to question not only the traditional tenets of "re"—restoration, reversibility and retreatability[45]—but

also the very issue of time in which, and in the anticipation of which, conservation is performed. Could a reorientation of conservation toward the present, rather than the future, render it more sensitive to the most pressing issues of our times, such as social justice and commitment to diversity and equity?[46] Caring for a work of art may be just one moment or aspect of the larger project of conservation. Through performance, which is radically now, a question emerges: why not preserve, and indulge, the present, as the only reality to which we have access?

Mapping the field: Chapter by chapter

The first part of this volume, "Theoretical Entanglements," articulates theories around the interweaving of conservation, care and performance. Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire, Pip Laurenson describes the expanding assemblage of agents and motivations that come into play in the perpetuation of Tony Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*. She then refers to the notion of charisma—such as that of early Christian "miracle workers"—to understand the persisting importance of the artist's persona for the continuity of their work after their death.

Rebecca Schneider, engaging in an antiphonal call and response with Hölling, proposes to apply to all objects the concept of antiphony. "To think with antiphony," she tells us, "might suggest that an object may have called and answered." Now faced with the responsibility to answer back, conservators enter a co-performance with objects (or gestures) that reiterate through time.

Hélia Marçal's essay "Vitality and the Conservation of Performance" invites us to reconsider both conservation and its object through the prism of vitalism and theories of new materialisms. Vitality, Marçal suggests, can open a path to a rethinking of conservation that takes into account both the vital agency of artworks to change museum practices and conservation's own agency over artworks, calling for a more affirmative and distributed ethics of conservation.

Echoing Marçal's vitalist take on non-human agencies, Gabriella Giannachi posits the importance of considering the entire "environment" of a work for documenting complex environmental and performance works, which she understands as positioned both in nature and in culture. Derived from environmental theory notions of environment, nature and climate, Giannachi's proposed framework emphasizes the importance of the audience and audience-generated documentation for sustaining the work's evolution over time.

Archeologist Shadreck Chirikure describes how heritage preservation is performed in West and Central Africa as the active use of cultural practices over generations. Creativity and change are understood as a natural part of this process of preservation through continuity of performance, moving away from the Western notion of an "authentic" frozen performance.

The second part of the book, "The Politics and Institutions of Conservation and Care," investigates how performance conservation challenges the structural and social organizations of museums and archives, opening the way to new

workflows and ethics of care. Iona Goldie-Scot describes how the "experimental acquisition" of Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room* (2014) shed light on the infrastructural barriers and gaps in the collecting and preserving practices in place at the Walker Art Center. The failed attempt to collect "memories" instead of objects around this performance undermines the culture of infallibility of the museum and demands a different distribution of responsibilities within the museum's structure.

By contrast, Brian Castriota and Claire Walsh's account of the acquisition of Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones's *The Touching Contract* (2016) by the Irish Museum of Modern Art tells us a rather exemplary story of intra- and extra-institutional cooperation and collective ownership modeled around the specific needs of an artwork. Their proposed ethics of care also provides a reflection on the authoritative mechanisms at play in institutions.

Archive specialist Farris Wahbeh contributes informed insight on the pressure that performance works are putting on archival practices and outlines some development perspectives, building upon archival principles such as the records continuum. Informed by his experience and knowledge, Wahbeh proposes a functional framework for archiving performance.

Questioning and dismantling the colonial founding values of Western museums is central to Kelli Morgan's efforts as a scholar, curator and educator. In her discussion with this book's editors, Morgan emphasizes the importance of bringing lasting change to museum collections and operating systems, which she does in practice by "applying Black radical traditions to museum practices." This contribution sheds light on the complex practices operating at the very core of performance's institutionalization and how they might shape our understanding of performance works.

For Eléonore Hellio and Michel Ekeba of the collective Kongo Astronauts, who relate some of their performance practices to the violence of colonial extraction in Congo, the perpetuation of their work happens through collaborative, social practices and through the ongoing creative process of repairing and improving their cosmonaut costumes, which are made of repurposed electronics. Rather than rely on museums as institutions of care, Kongo Astronauts comprise their own institution, developing their own mechanisms of support, transmission and change.

In the third part of the book, "Living Conservation," performance's continuation is explored through the lens of embodied transmission and of collective practices of care. Artist Dread Scott discusses his work *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* (2019), which explores the reenactment of alternative histories as an empowering—and potentially future-changing—practice in the present. Scott also reflects on the institutional afterlife of this project as a film.

Karolina Wilczyńska's essay on Mierle Laderman Ukeles's work as a "maintenance artist" establishes parallels between practices of care in socially-engaged performance art and in the institutional conservation of performance. Echoing Castriota and Walsh, Wilczyńska questions what it means to care for a performance about care, and how similar gestures of care carry different values in different social and institutional contexts.

Two different conversations then delve into practices of (body-to-body) transmission inherited from dance history. Megan Metcalf and Cori Olinghouse bring together their practical and theoretical knowledge of dance and performance to propose guiding principles for an embodied stewardship of performance that include the entire community of people involved in the performance—from artists to audience. Erin Brannigan and Louise Lawson engage in a conversation about the intersections of dance and the visual arts in the museum through the prism of the research project Precarious Movements: Choreography and the Museum (2021–2024), emphasizing the historical role dance played in the emergence of performance art. Brannigan and Lawson draw on the art form's inherent "precarity" to advocate once again for conservation to engage with non-hierarchical, community-based transmission practices and to seize rehearsals and moments of activation in the gallery as collective learning moments.

The work of Cauleen Smith, like that of Scott, is animated by the belief that performing the past might help to change the future. Identifying as a filmmaker, Smith orchestrates events that are destined to become films, and her work has entered institutions in various forms such as video installations, photographs, banners or performative slide lectures—pointing once more to the relationship between performance and its material manifestations.

The diverse perspectives gathered here—historical, artistic, theoretical, practical and beyond—do not build a consensus on the conservation of performance, or a clear road map for its future. On the contrary, while some answers are provided, many more questions are asked. We hope that this book continues to provoke questions about the presence and possibilities of performance in art's institutions and systems, as well as conservation's potential to expand and extend care in new, radical ways.

Notes

1 "Performance-based arts" (Ger. "Aufführungskünste") was propagated in the context of a German Research Foundation research project led by Barbara Büscher and Franz Anton Cramer. For these scholars, performance-based art transcends disciplines and genres and focuses on interfaces "where performance appears as configurations and constellations of [various] arts." See Barbara Büscher and Franz Anton Cramer, "From Work to the Performance: Reflections on Performance Art in the Museums," *VDR Beiträge* 2 (2017): 93; "Collecting as Artistic and Documentary Practice: Towards a Fluid Access to Artefacts of/in Performance," Collecting and Conserving Performance Art, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, June 10, 2016, video of lecture, www.restauratoren.de/collecting-and-conserving-performance-art-videos.

2 Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge is a four-year collaborative research project led by Hanna B. Hölling (principal investigator) in collaboration with Jules Pelta Feldman (postdoctoral fellow), Emilie Magnin (doctoral candidate), Joanna Leśnierowska (artistic collaborator), Valerian Maly (associated artistic collaborator), Electra D'Emilio (project assistant) and Charles Wrapner (project assistant).

3 In addition to the writers whose essays are collected here, these have included Marina Abramović, Marilyn Arsem, Philip Auslander, Gabi Berlinger, Claire Bishop, Amy Brost, Barbara Büscher, Rivka Eisner, Florian Feigl, Thomas Gartmann, Kate

Hennessy, Sabine Himmelsbach, Amelia Jones, Sarah Kenderdine, Sooyoung Leam, Esa Nickle, Alva Noë, Florian Reichert, Heike Roms, Michaela Schäuble, and the team behind the research project Collecting the Ephemeral: Prerequisites and Possibilities for Making Performance Art Last, led by Wolfgang Brückle and Rachel Mader.

4 Several important projects have paved the ground for our thinking about the conservation of performance: Inside Movement Knowledge (Netherlands Media Art Institute, 2009–10); archiv performativ: Ein Modellkonzept für die Dokumentation und Aktualisierung von Performancekunst (Zurich University of the Arts, 2010–12); Collecting the Performative with The Live List (Tate, Van Abbemuseum, Masstricht University, 2012–14); Documentation and Conservation of Performance (Tate, 2016–21); Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in a Museum (2018–21).

5 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 107. See Chapter 1 by Pip Laurenson and Chapter 3 by Hélia Marçal in this volume; see also Hanna B. Hölling, "Introduction: Object—Event–Performance," in *Object—Event—Performance: Art, Materiality and Continuity since the 1960s*, ed. Hanna B. Hölling (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2022), 1–39.

6 Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015).

7 Noë, *Strange Tools*. The situatedness of knowledge is prominent in Donna Haraway and feminist materialisms.

8 The question is inspired by Bernard Stiegler, "What is Called Caring: Beyond the Anthropocene," translated by Daniel Ross, *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, 21: 2–3 (2017), 386–404. Stiegler adapts the title of his essay from Martin Heidegger's 1951–52 lecture course, Was Heisst Denken ("what is called thinking").

9 Before it acquired the meaning of tending to wounds and helping them heal, the word "care" was linked with Old English "caru," meaning "sorrow, anxiety, grief, burdens of mind," and in Old French with care for animals (feeding or grooming).

10 See: Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London: Verso, 2020); Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Selma Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics*, trans. Liz Savage (London: Routledge, 1998); Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

11 Stiegler, "What is Called Caring."

12 "Selling Point: Julia Pelta Feldman on Deaccessioning as Restitution," *Artforum.com*, November 20, 2020, www.artforum.com/slant/julia-pelta-feldman-on-deaccessioning-as-restitution-84506.

13 Lens-based performance designates a work usually realized in front of a camera and presented later as a recording, such as in much work by Vito Acconci. Spectacle-based performance involves live beholders or participants.

14 Amelia Jones, "Temporal Anxiety/'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Perormance as Documenation," in *Archaeologies of Presence*, ed. Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks (London: Routledge, 2012), 197–221; Rebecca Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts," *TDR/The Drama Review* 58, no. 2 (2015): 14–32; Diana Taylor, "Saving the 'Live'? Re-performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage," *Études anglaises* 69, no. 2 (2016): 149–161.

15 An important distinction has been made between reenactment and the historically informed reinterpretation of performance. For discussions of reenactment, see Robert Blackson, "Once More… with Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture," *Art Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 28–40; Sven Lütticken, "An Arena in Which to Reenact," in: *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary*

Art, ed. Sven Lütticken (Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, 2005), 17–60; on reenactments in general, see Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2012); Martha Buskirk, Amelia Jones and Caroline A. Jones, "The Year in 'Re-,'" *Artforum* 52, no. 4 (2013): 127–130; Cristina, Baldacci, Clio Nicastro, and Arianna Sforzini, eds., *Over and Over and Over Again: Reenactment Strategies in Contemporary Arts and Theory* (Berlin: Institute for Contemporary Inquiry Berlin Press, 2022).

16 The acquisition of performances by MoMA, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Tate has brought about conversations regarding bodily learning and the transmission of knowledge in the form of accounts and experience. See, for instance, Athena Christa Holbrook, "Assembling the Body, Reactivating Presence: Collecting, Processing, and Conserving Performance at The Museum of Modern Art," Collecting and Conserving Performance Art, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, June 10, 2016, video of lecture, www.restauratoren.de/collecting-and-conserving-performance-art-videos.

17 Hanna B. Hölling, "The Aesthetics of Change: On the Relative Durations of the Impermanent and Critical Thinking in Conservation," in *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation,* ed. Erma Hermens and Frances Robertson (London: Archetype, 2016), 13–24.

18 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146. Less remarked upon, yet just as influential in performance discourses has been Phelan's corollary insistence that performance's disappearance guarantees its radical independence from the art market and other capital-driven machinations of the art system.

19 Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia;" Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *Performing Arts Journal*, no. 84 (2006): 1–10.

20 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011).

21 Gabriella Giannachi, "Performance at Tate: The Scholarly and Museological Context," *Tate Papers* 8 (2014).

22 Christopher Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (London: Routledge, 2012), 77–89. On a fruitful translation of Bedford's argument into curatorial practice, see Judit Bodor, "The 'Extended Life' of Performance: Curating 1960s Multimedia Art in the Contemporary Museum," in *The Explicit Material: Inquiries on the Intersection of Curatorial and Conservation Cultures*, ed. Hanna B. Hölling, Francesca Bewer and Katharina Ammann (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 117–41.

23 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

24 André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2010), 31.

25 Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.

26 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

27 Accounts of museums' acquisitions of performance works detail institutions' attempts to build new, more flexible practices and also the difficulties and resistances involved. See Teresa Calonje, ed., *Live Forever: Collecting Live Art* (Cologne: König, 2014); Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Megan Metcalf, "Making the Museum Dance: Simone Forti's *Huddle* (1961) and Its Acquisition by the Museum of Modern Art," *Dance Chronicle* 45, no. 1 (2022): 30–56. In this volume, see Goldie-Scot (Chapter 6) and Castriota & Walsh (Chapter 7).

28 See Vivian van Saaze, "In the Absence of Documentation: Remembering Tino Sehgal's Constructed Situations," in *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of*

Contemporary Art, ed. Lúcia Almeida Matos, Rita Macedo and Gunnar Heydenreich (Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte, 2013), 55–63; Pip Laurenson and Vivian van Saaze, "Collecting Performance-based Art: New Challenges and Shifting Perspectives," in *Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters*, ed. Outi Remes, Laura Macculloch, and Marika Leino (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014), 27–41; and Pip Laurenson, "Tino Sehgal, This is Propaganda, 2002," in *Inside Installations*, ed. Tatja Scholte and Paulien't Hoen (Amsterdam: Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art / Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 2007), 35–42.

29 Performance works by Sehgal have been acquired not only by prominent museums like The Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Tate, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the Stedelijk Museum, but also by private collections, including Switzerland's Beyeler Foundation.

30 For a selection of resources concerning the conservation of contemporary art, see Miguel Angel Corzo, ed., *Mortality Immortality: The Legacy of 20th-Century Art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999); Ijsbrand Hummelen and Dionne Sillé, eds., *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (London: Archetype Books, 2006); Alison Lee Bracker and Alison Richmond, eds., *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009); Oscar Chiantore and Antonio Rava, *Conserving Contemporary Art: Issues, Methods, Materials, and Research* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013); for time-based media and media art, see: Pip Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations," *Tate Papers* 6 (2006); Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta G. Saba, Barbara Le Maître, and Vinzenz Hediger, eds., *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Pip Laurenson, "Old Media, New Media? Significant Difference and the Conservation of Software Based Art," in *New Collecting: Exhibiting and Audiences after New Media Art*, ed. Beryl Graham (London: Routledge, 2014), 73–96; Hanna B. Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive: Time, Change and Materiality in Media Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); for installation art: Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton, eds., *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Marina Pugliese and Barbara Ferrani, *Ephemeral Monuments: History and Conservation of Installation Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013); Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); for digital art: Annet Dekker, *Collecting and Conserving Net Art: Moving beyond Conventional Methods* (London: Routledge, 2018); and for kinetic art: Rachel Rivenc and Reinhart Bek, eds., *Keep it Moving? Conserving Kinetic Art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2018). This list is inexhaustive.

31 For an overview of the most important events in the field of contemporary art conservation, see Hélia Marçal, "Contemporary Art Conservation," Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum, Tate, 2019, www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible/research-approach-conservation, accessed March 24, 2022.

32 For "freeze strategies," see Ijsbrand Hummelen, Vivian van Saaze, and Matthijs Versteegh, "Towards a Symmetrical Approach in Conservation?," in *ICOM-CC 15th Triennial Conference Preprints, 22–26 September 2008*, vol. 2, ed. Janet Bridgland (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2008), 1041–47. For "freeze frame paradigm," see van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum*, 56–57, 129, 132, 139, 184. For freeze frame as locking the work in time, see Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive*, 12.

33 The Variable Media Approach emphasized behavioral aspects of media and advanced media-independent thinking about the future lives of the artworks. By allowing media historically used by the artist to change over time, this facilitated the maintenance of works in collections through reinterpretation, migration, and emulation. Alain Depocas, Jon Ippolito and Caitlin Jones, "Permanence Through

Change: The Variable Media Initiative," 2003, www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pub_index.html, accessed January 12, 2022.

34 Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91.

35 Renée van de Vall, Hanna Hölling, Tatja Scholte, and Sanneke Stigter, "Reflections on a Biographical Approach to Contemporary Art Conservation," in *ICOM-CC 16th Triennial Conference Preprints, Lisbon, 19–23 September 2011,* ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2011).

36 Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss."

37 Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss."

38 Tina Fiske, "White Walls: Installations, Absence, Iteration and Difference," in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, ed. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), 229–240.

39 Hanna B. Hölling, "The Technique of Conservation: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, special issue The Future of Conservation 40, no. 2, (2017): 87–96.

40 Hölling, "The Technique of Conservation;" Hölling, "Exhausting Conservation: Object, Event, Performance in Franz Erhard Walther's Werkstücke," in *Object—Event—Performance: Art, Materiality and Continuity since the 1960s*, ed. Hanna B. Hölling (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2022), 62–84; Hélia Marçal, "From Intangibility to Materiality and Back Again: Preserving Portuguese Performance Artworks from the 1970s" (PhD diss., Nova University Lisbon, 2018). The pan-European project New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art (2016–19) and the Tate's Reshaping the Collectible (2019–22) were underpinned by social science perspectives putting emphasis on the creation of social environments in which humans and their structures exist in a relationship.

41 Miriam Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued: Museum, Conservation and First Nations* (Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2002). A link between contemporary art and ethnographic collection was established by Renata Peters, "The Parallel Paths of Conservation of Contemporary Art and Indigenous Collections," *Studies in Conservation* 61, no. 2 (2016): 183–7.

42 Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2005). The grounds for the consideration of conservation as a web of actions and actors in a broader social field has been laid by van Saaze in *Installation Art and the Museum* and broadly discussed in the context of Dutch collaborative research projects such as New Strategies for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (2009–13) and New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art (2016–20) led by Renée van de Vall.

43 van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum*, 185.

44 Paul Eggert, *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture, and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 112. See also the chapter "Archival Activations and Creative Conservation," in Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive*, 158–60.

45 For the invocation of the principles of reversibility or retreatability, see Cornelia Weyer, "Media Art and the Limits of Established Ethics of Restoration," in *Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art: Reflections on the Roots and the Perspectives*, ed. Ursula Schädler-Saub and Angela Weyer (London: Archetype Books, 2010), 21–32.

46 Following Paul Schimmel and Robert Wilmot, Anna Schäffler claims that, after the Second World War and in the aftermath of the Holocaust and atom bomb—which has become again a tangible threat following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022—the anachronistic preserver may see the former zeal to keep things intact for the future as an illusion. Anna Schäffler, *Die Kunst der Erhaltung: Anna Opermanns Ensembles, zeigenössische Restaurierung und Nachlasspraxis im Wandel* (Berlin: Edition Metzel, 2021), 319–20.

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Part I

Care: Theoretical entanglements

1 Charisma and desire in the conservation of performance art

Pip Laurenson

The group sits in two circles, the inner circle is occupied by players and former players, the outer circle is for others. Together it is a dedicated big group, about 20 people. The discussion is based on an almost tangible veneration of the piece *Ten Years Alive in the Infinite Plain* and/or Tony Conrad. Striking indeed is that the distinction between the piece and the artist is not made and both are discussed with adoration. We, as humble "interpreters" or "transmitters" or just audience, are far removed from Mr. Conrad and his work. In the two-hour discussion not a single negative remark about Mr. Conrad ("Tony") or this work is made.

Harro van Lente, May 17, 2019[1]

The term "support" refers to an ongoing human relationship that depends upon a long-term commitment between The Artist and The Client who have encountered each other in a positive way. Support is therefore defined here as a kind of unconditional love.

Ima-Abasi Okon and The Showroom Gallery, 2019[2]

Introduction

In this chapter I look at the figure of the artist and their authority through the lens of a performance-based artwork, *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* by Tony Conrad, as an example of a complex artwork that has served to shift the practice of conservators, registrars, archivists and curators working within the art museum. This work has asked these actors, or museum workers, to acknowledge and make more visible the networks of people and technologies that operate outside the museum and upon which the continued performance of such works rely. I offer an account of the relationship between the network and the artist and seek to explore artistic authority through the ideas of charisma and desire with the aim of adding to our understanding of the transition point between the authority of the living artist and their authority after death. This chapter is written from a standpoint inside the museum, by someone who has worked with museum collections for thirty years. It acknowledges the slippery distinction between the power of the institution and the relationships held between individuals inside and outside the museum. The aim of this chapter is

not to pass judgement on who should have authority in any transaction, but instead to offer one possible and incomplete account of how artistic authority operates both in relation to the social network in which it is situated, and in relation to the museum.

By inserting the idea of unconditional love into her general service agreement with the Showroom Gallery in 2019 the artist Ima-Abasi Okon planted the most powerful relational concept we have in our language into a transactional document, destabilising the relationship between the artist and the institution.[3] Unconditional love suggests that one will put the interests of the other above one's own and that nothing the other can do will lead to them no longer being loved. It starts from a position of radical generosity that is at odds with the usual transactional relationships described in legal documents. It also lays on the table the relationship between the institution and the artist, switching the discourse from a transactional concern with power, authority and control to love. The politics of the relationship between the artist and the museum and those often-invisible museum workers who work within it are complex. While recognizing the power that the museum represents, built on the foundations of a colonial system for constructing and controlling a particular imperialist narrative of history, it is also the case that within the museum artists are provided some power, albeit demarcated. For example, an acknowledgement of the authority of the artist is central to the way in which contemporary art conservation is practiced within Western contemporary art museums.[4] The focus of contemporary art conservation is on learning what is important to preserve about a work and documenting that, with the intent of understanding how to fit the work into existing frameworks and systems of documentation and care within the museum, or in some cases extending the museum's systems and structures of care. Through their acts of care, conservators, like curators, often feel a strong connection to the artists and artwork they work with and take pride in the quality of those relationships. While practices might vary regarding the degree of support, authority and control given to artists about the care and display of their works, within standards of "good practice" within contemporary art conservation in the West, living artists are consulted and their views about conservation issues put on record through tools such as the artist interview.[5] These records are subsequently given significant weight in conservation decision-making.

Although power in the relationship between the artist and the museum depends on the status, confidence, experience and often persistence of the artist, relationships with artists are vitally important. When their work is bought into a collection or loaned to a museum, it is not unusual for artists to create specifications and conditions regarding the display of their works, the use of images, restrictions on loans, and guidelines for what can be replaced. These specifications might also determine who is authorized to carry out certain activities.[6] The focus in these transactions is however often on the figure of the individual artist rather than the broader social network that exists outside the museum in support of a complex work. Performance artworks are interesting because they often bring to the fore those social networks in which the artwork is situated. However, as identified in the above quotation from the field notes of Professor Harro van Lente, the

foregrounding of the social network that emerged outside the museum over a number of years around *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* did not in this case diminish the authority of the artist but instead seemed to amplify it.

I consider the role of the artist in the production and persistence of a performance artwork from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire as a way of understanding how a performance comes together as a fluid assemblage of socio-material relations.[7] Desire helps us to understand the motivating force for the assembling of the network, and charisma is the force that draws people to join the network. My account attempts to provide an explanation as to why a shift in focus to the networks of people and technologies that operate outside the museum does not act to decenter the artist, why the artist has remained persistently foregrounded. I draw upon the historical concept of charisma to understand how the role of the artist continues to operate within the ideas of transmission that are central to the conservation of performance art.

Charisma is capable of eliciting love. The centrality of the artist and the authority given to them by contemporary art conservators in their practice has been pointed to by those from other disciplines, such as anthropology, as somewhat blinkered and limiting, creating what is seen as a blind spot within contemporary conservation practice.[8] As the two quotations that open this chapter, one from Ima-Abasi Okon's General Service Agreement and the other from the fieldnotes of Professor Harro van Lente indicate, the relationship between those supporting the artist and their work might have more in common with unconditional love than is commonly found appropriate in relation to the objects of study in the academy. The exploration of desire and charisma, therefore, also provides us with an alternative account of the relationship of those who are responsible for the care and stewardship of artworks to the artist and their artworks, which is so often simply read as naïve or sycophantic.[9]

Live performance in collections

Live performance art has caught the imagination of conservation and those within the museum concerned with the stewardship of collections. While I do not want to perpetuate binary thinking about the material and immaterial, these works bring to the fore a consideration of transmission over time and between generations. To claim that a performance work can be passed on from one person to another and to persist or remain is to evoke the debate about the ontology of performance with some, most famously Peggy Phelan, arguing that: "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance."[10] Whereas others, such as Rebecca Schneider, have argued against the equation of performance with disappearance. For Schneider this amounts to the privileging of the document over other types of knowledge, a privileging that has its roots as a tool of empire to undermine local knowledges and present memory as having failed.[11] When works come into the museum, a judgement has already been

made that these live works can be repeated and performed again and again over time, as a fundamental condition of an artwork becoming a museum object.

To understand the ideas of transmission at play it might be useful to consider a couple of examples. One of the first live performance works to come into Tate's collection was Tino Sehgal's *This is Propaganda*, 2002. Sehgal, as part of his practice, insists that there be no material remains from his works. He therefore does not allow the work to be recorded, photographed or documented, resisting these standard museum technologies. Instead, he requires that the work is remembered and transmitted using "body-to-body transmission," pointing to a tradition in dance, for example, where one dancer teaches another the dance through physically practicing, copying, or perhaps physically correcting the bodily movements. This stands in contrast to transmission through documentation and challenges the museum to learn new ways of thinking about memory. Of the live works which started to enter Tate's collection in 2005,[12] some performance works operate in ways that make them simple to care for—such as delegated performances activated from simple instructions.[13]

The artwork *Time* (1970) by David Lamelas exists in Tate's collection as two manifestations, each with their own accession number. One is a silver gelatin photograph and the other is a live performance work. The photograph documents the first performance of Lamelas's *Time* 1970 in the French Alps (Figure 1.1). The instructions for the live performance work are simple and flexible: a group of people stand in a line; the first person tells the time to the next person; they "receive" the time and "hold on to it" before announcing it to the next participant; the last person announces it "to the world" in the language of their choice. The work has been performed in numerous locations, from outside in the French Alps as shown in the photograph (Figure 1.1) to the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern (Figure 1.2) to recently being performed on Zoom and live streamed on YouTube in 2020 (Figure 1.3). The performance of the work has also adjusted to the different devices for telling the time, from wrist watches to mobile phones to computer clocks.[14]

Figure 1.1 David Lamelas, *Time*, 1970. A group of people stand in a line outside against the backdrop of a snowy mountain scene. Some people have skis. The person at the end of the line looks at their watch. Photograph © David Lamelas.

Figure 1.2 David Lamelas, *Time*, 1970 © David Lamelas. Performed as part of UBS Openings: Live—The Living Currency, Tate Modern, January 26–27, 2008. Photograph © Tate. People stand on a white line on the floor in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern.
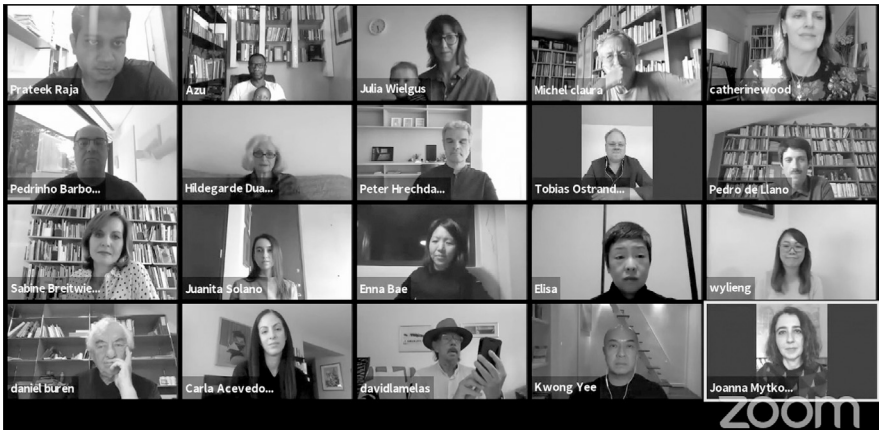
Figure 1.3 David Lamelas, *Time*, 2020 © David Lamelas. Online performance and live streaming on YouTube (video still from the first iteration on April 19, 2020). Courtesy the artist and Jan Mot, Brussels. Twenty people are presented in squares on the screen streaming from their homes, two have small children on their laps. Each person is identified by their name. David Lamelas is looking at his phone.

Other forms of performance are more complex, less flexible and easy to steward and "update." Instead they push up against the structures and definitions of the museum, asking fundamental questions, not only about how much improvisation, indeterminacy, change and fluidity are possible for a collected artwork but also how the museum is to maintain such a work within a structure designed to keep objects and to keep them the same.[15] These artworks serve to reveal the tools and structures of the museum and our practices that have been honed over the centuries in the mission to render artworks in the art museum static, and independent from ongoing practices of "making" that might come from continued dynamic and physical engagement with the artist and their context. The limited efficacy of the standard rhythms of display within the museum for works that require memory and body-to-body transmission are highlighted by the display cycle of Sehgal's *This is Propaganda*. Since entering the Tate's collection in 2005 it was shown in the Tate Triennial at Tate Britain in 2006 and then not again until it was part of BMW Tate Live at Tate Modern from June 17–19, 2016. It has not been shown since, but let us imagine that the next time the work is displayed might be in 2026—is a ten-year cycle frequent enough for the memory of the work to be effectively transmitted?

Unlike *This is Propaganda* there are no restrictions on documenting Conrad's complex performance work *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, 1972. Unlike Lamelas's *Time*, *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* did not come with a score, in fact Conrad was famously anti-score.[16] Instead, Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* sits somewhere in between, in that the conservation strategy has been to create a document—a dossier of text, image, audio and video and also to recognize the importance of person-to-person transmission and acknowledging the knowledge held by the social network that surrounds and supports the work, and which exists outside the museum.

Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* is a live 90-minute work that was first performed at the experimental arts venue The Kitchen in New York in 1972. While the work has within its life been performed in different configurations, at Tate Liverpool in 2019 it was performed with one violin live and one recording of Conrad playing the violin, a bass guitar, a long string drone (an instrument invented by Conrad) and four film projections. During the 90-minute performance the four film projectors project an image of black and white vertical stripes which very slowly come together as one square. Towards the end of his life, Conrad had devised a form of the work where his violin part could be replaced by a recording of him playing on a loop. This was used when he was not well enough to perform. While alive Conrad was central to the teaching of the work prior to a performance, travelling to the venue a few days in advance and creating a social connection with those involved. Accounts tell of Conrad's sociability, that he enjoyed spending time with young people, was happy to join or suggest a party. As the curator Maria Palacios Cruz recalls, when he came to perform *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* at Paleis voor Schone Kunsten organized by ARGOS in Brussels in 2007, "he was the sort of person you could easily meet and spend a really fun evening with, feeling, maybe, a closeness. I think everyone felt close to him."[17] Lectures often

accompanied his performances and to all accounts these were very funny. In talking about an introduction that Conrad gave to a performance at Café Otto Maria Palacious Cruz recounts "the way he did it, in a way, I guess, transforms the audience into finding it all very funny, or accepting it or opening it up, or not finding things hermetic or difficult. So that's the thing. … [I]f you see his work without him, his work is very dry."[18] During our research, it was not uncommon for our requests for information from past performers of *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* to end with comments such as "Tony was the nicest guy you could imagine!"[19] Conrad created a close connection with people during these performances of his work, extending the network of those who cared for the work.

My first encounter with *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* as a collection care specialist and a conservator was a performance of the work in the Tanks, a performance space in Tate Modern, on January 18, 2017, approximately nine months after Conrad's death.[20] Thanks to the foresight of the curators Andrea Lissoni and Carly Whitefield, this performance provided a moment to bring some of the network of people that surrounded *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* together to co-create the way in which the work might continue without Conrad's presence as its primary instigator, transmitter, teacher and first violinist. There was therefore no doubt that in order to think about how this work might enter Tate's collection we needed to consider and develop an understanding of that social network and its evolving role in sustaining *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain.*

Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain formed the first work to be studied as part of the research project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum. The aim was to build and test a dossier of images, text, video and audio that would form the basis of information to be provided to new performers of the work. This had been compiled by Time-based Media Conservation in consultation with the artist's estate, headed by the artist Tony Oursler, Andrew Lampert, the archivist of the estate, and previous performers and collaborators with Conrad. The new performers of the work had arrived at Tate Liverpool a day early to rehearse before they performed the work to a small, invited audience who gathered after the performance. In the center of those who gathered after the performance were those who had performed the work before with Conrad, some more than once. These are the "transmitters" of the work. With them were the new performers who had just played the work live for the first time. Gathered around them were conservators, curators, registrars, technicians and two academic observers.[21]

The conversation examined what had been conveyed and what had been lost in the transmission of this work through the dossier, with the exchange focusing on the "embedded know how" of those assembled. One of the transmitters read from notes she found about her experience of playing of the piece: "My arm hurt, I wanted to stop but I was so worried that if I did I just wouldn't be able to start again."

After all the preparation—the readying of equipment and prints; the assembling of spaces, and people; the testing; the shipping; the building; the unpacking; the tuning of instruments; the checking; the documenting the performing of all of these practices—demonstrated the close attention to the specificity of the human and non-human material that makes up this work. While the week culminated in a second performance of the work, this time for the public (see Figure 1.4), what had also been performed was conservation as a social activity involving people and things which extend beyond the museum.

Performance artworks sit well with the direction of travel of contemporary art conservation in that they bring to the fore the social and the relational nature of conservation, raising the question of the performance's ability to exist beyond the presence of the artist and also bringing different ways of knowing and epistemic cultures such as those from dance and theater into the museum. Performance artworks, perhaps more than any other complex artworks, make visible the reality that artworks are situated within networks or assemblages of human and non-human agents which are essential to their realization.[22]

The artist and the museum

The figure of the artist in the contemporary art museum has in many ways been untouched by a decentering of the artist in academic discourse, particularly within literary criticism. Take for example Roland Barthes's claim that the construction of the author is essentially an expression of a bourgeois ideology where the creator is seen not only as an individual but as a determinate and

Figure 1.4 Performance of Tony Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, 1972. The four film projections are visible on the white wall, the audience sits in front on the floor and the projectors and the person who is manipulating the projections stand behind. Tate Liverpool, Light Night. Photograph © Mark McNulty.

fixed source of works of art, possessing privileged access to their meaning.[23] This challenge to the artist as individual creator claims that artistic production is collective, that it reflects the social structures in which it operates and also that artworks are co-created by the audience.[24] Janet Wolff notes that as theory continues to decenter the subject and displace the artist as creator, popular culture seems to increase its interest in biography. Similarly, the artist continues to be a central figure within the contemporary art museum and its conservation practices. While relationships with artists are widely recognized as essential for successful curatorial practice, the importance of these relationships within conservation practice is often underacknowledged and rendered invisible within the art museum. In part this is because to make these relationships visible would be to challenge the epistemic hierarchies and delineation of roles. However, there are examples of recent initiatives that have served to make the relationships and working practices of collaboration between artists and conservators more visible. For example, the modern and contemporary art museum SFMOMA (The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), in the reopening of their museum with the new wing designed by the architects Snøhetta in 2016, championed a vision of the artist at the center of the museum, creating dedicated spaces for collaborative work between conservators and artists. The framing of conservation as a practice of care also foregrounds relationality where the artist, the artwork and an existing network of care surrounding a work can all become part of a focus of that care.

Within the West, despite the biographical artist and their intent being the dominant way in which the artist is portrayed within the art museum, any wish to decenter the artist to align with developments in literary theory is done against a backdrop of knowing that the place of the artist within the contemporary art museum has been hard won through its own political struggle. A defining moment in this history was the founding of the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) in 1969 prompted by protests surrounding the removal by Takis (Takis Vassilakis) on January 3 of his work *Tele-Sculpture* (1960) from the exhibition *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* at Museum of Modern Art in New York. Although the work was in the museum's collection, the artist had expressed his wish for the work not to be included in the exhibition on the grounds that it did not represent his most recent work. The AWC was not the only group of artists protesting against museums at the time,[25] however it was a high-profile group that demanded not only more rights for artists over their works but also greater representation of Black, Indigenous and women artists.[26] While museums still control when a work is exhibited and largely in what context, in the intervening years legislation both in the US and in Europe has afforded greater rights to artists.[27] While large institutions of course hold far more power than any individual artist, and scandals regularly occur when museums overlook artists' wishes, this is not inconsistent with many individuals within museums being mindful of the power of the institution and working to accommodate an artist's wishes.

The concept of "artist's intent" has been central within contemporary art conservation, supported by practices of the artist interview[28] and the acknowledgement of engagement in dialogue regarding the care of works in a collection that can span many years. Although unusual in her engagement with the museum, the artist Ima-Abasi Okon's interaction with conservators during the installation of her works, as part of the spotlight display at Tate Britain in 2021, is a case in point. Okon's relationship with the conservators Jack McConchie and Libby Ireland was developed over a number of months during which time Okon wished to understand and learn more about their practice while the conservators sought to understand what was important to the installation and conservation of her works. Okon did not however want to be recorded, as is standard with conservation interviews, resisting the practice of fixing. Also, Covid-19 restrictions prevented some of the testing that might normally happen with a new work before it went into the gallery to establish the boundaries of the configuration of the elements. The time installing the work was therefore key to understanding how to care for the work, moving this process into a more informal space where a relationship of mutual trust could be built.[29]

This partial and hard-won authority gained by artists is made murky by the persistence of the modernist figure of the artist.[30] For example, one only needs to look at the standard output in promotional and educational videos by our major art institutions to see the tropes of the lone artist in the studio repeated and promoted.[31] On the whole monographic exhibitions do better commercially than group or thematic exhibitions, focusing as they do on a singular artist and often incorporating extensive biographical material. While the museum might be aware of some of the problematics in the way in which the figure of the artist is thought about, it is true that the art museum is out of pace with academia in its construction and analysis of the figure of the artist. While the experience of practitioners within the museum points to a more collective notion of artistic production, it has proven difficult to separate the museum messaging from the image of the sole artist genius which also underpins the logic of the art market.

The respect shown to artists is also entangled with a desire from those working within the contemporary art museum to find a place of hospitality for the artists with whom they engage within structures and systems which are sometimes at odds with that desire.[32] Ima-Abasi Okon, in the quote from her General Service Agreement that opened this chapter, adds love as well as pay, recognition and representation into the demands of artists in the twenty-first century.

Desire and charisma and the relational

Writing from a time riven by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the laying bare of widespread and entrenched systemic racism and inequity in society, it is not surprising that we are thinking about connectedness and the nature of those connections, nor is it surprising that we are thinking about what happens when people leave our socially entangled networks. How does foregrounding the social entanglements of artworks impact the way in which

we frame the relationship between the artwork and the museum? How does paying attention to the socially entangled nature of art change the way in which the museum operates when introducing the museum into the dynamic network surrounding an artwork?[33] Rather than seeing the transition of an artwork into a museum collection as similar to an amoeba slowly engulfing its prey, we might see this as a process whereby the museum enters the network of the artwork, impacting the dynamics of that network as it becomes part of it, not by destroying or ignoring or delegitimizing, but amplifying it.

I am aware of the power dynamic at play when the museum joins the network surrounding an artwork, and perhaps it is naïve and unrealistic to imagine the museum serving to amplify the network. However, it is an essential step towards shifting the colonial mindset of the museum away from possession to something more relational. My reference point for the use of the term "relational" here is largely through a lineage of Donna Haraway and María Puig de la Bellacasa's analysis of care in her book *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds.* [34] I evoke the "relational" in contrast to possession where the museum is focused on removing the object from its context, severing those ties and placing it within a neutral space to be appreciated as a timeless and transcendent art object and slotted into the museum's imperialist narrative, part of what Fernando Domínguez Rubio would call "the modern aesthetic regime of art."[35] In contrast to this process of abstraction is the idea that, to quote Haraway, "nothing comes without its world" where meeting produces a world.[36] To see this world creates a different dynamic in relation to the artwork which characterizes care. As Puig de la Bellacasa points out "Caring and relating share ontological resonance" and she points to political scientist Joan Tronto and feminist educator Berenice Fisher's definition of care to highlight this relationship as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web."[37] What Puig de la Bellacasa does is to highlight the implications of the relational within a speculative ethics of care, drawing attention to how this ethics of care, which puts the relational central to "thinking with," disrupts standard narratives about the relationship among art, artists and the museum. This account seeks to consider the artist, the artwork and the social network that surrounds it by exploring concepts of desire and charisma.[38] I ground this text particularly in the relationship between Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* and Tate but the ideas explored also resonate across a wide range of contemporary works of art and artists and institutions.

As highlighted above, from the first moment I encountered Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* it was clear the work was dependent on a wide variety of people and things who had for many years sustained and cared for the work and whose responsibilities had shifted and continued to change since Conrad's death in 2016. These were performers of the work, curators, archivists, gallerists, producers, scholars, friends and family, who through their different practices cared for the work, its memory and the legacy of the work of Conrad. These were a trusted group of transmitters of the work, some of whom already had a group identity as

the "cooks," a reference to their connection to the independent media space The Kitchen in New York where the work was first performed.

The initial network emerged over a long duration, starting with Rhys Chatham inviting Conrad to perform this work at The Kitchen in 1972, and connecting different people and places over the intervening years. Many members of the network had professional roles tied up with this work. The network is reformed, and often extended each time it is performed. While Conrad was alive, he mixed friends, colleagues and collaborators with those who were new to the work and local to the venue in which the work was to be performed, expanding the network. The network on which the realization and continuation of the work is dependent also includes instruments such as various long string drones, carpets and film material, diagrams and clocks, all of which had their own stories.

In thinking about the dynamics of this network or assemblage I found the analogy to another network helpful, namely that which is convened around the business of assisted reproduction.[39] Taking as my reference point the work of geographers Martin Müller and Carolin Schurr, I am interested in what an analysis of the assemblage of precarious social relations, needed for the market in assisted reproduction, could tell us that would help us understand the assemblage of social relations and particularly concepts of desire around the performance artwork *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain.*

Here I follow Müller and Schurr in referencing the philosopher Philip Goodchild[40] and ultimately the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari in an understanding of desire or wish as a productive force, "a spontaneous emergence that generates relationship through a synthesis of multiplicities."[41] If we

Figure 1.5 Feedback session after the new performers had played for the transmitters, Tate Liverpool, May 2019. From left to right: violin transmitter Angharad Davies, long string drone transmitter Rhys Chatham, curator Xavier Garcia Bardon. In the background: registrar Stephen Huyton and research manager Kit Webb. Photograph © Tate, Roger Sinek.
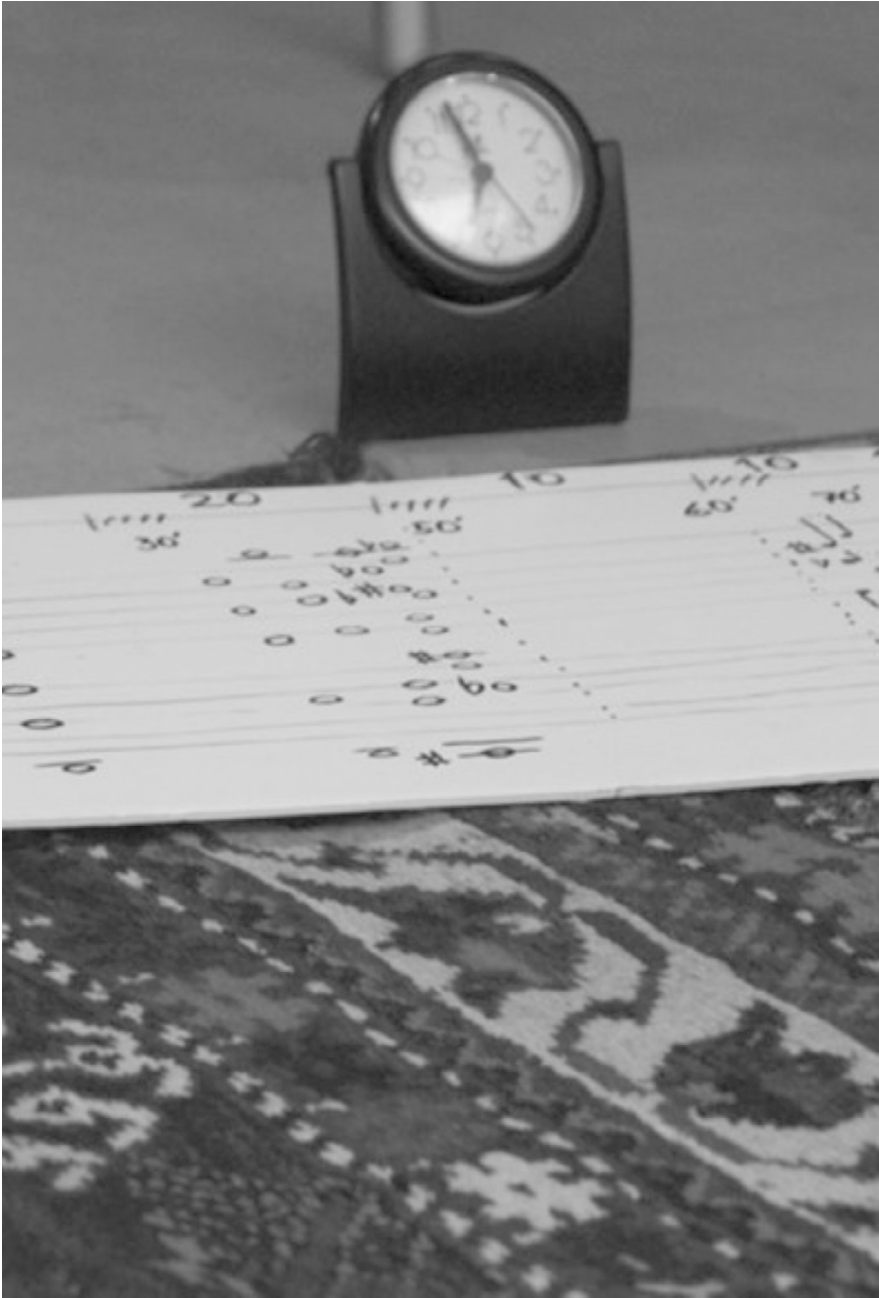
Figure 1.6 Detail from a photograph taken of the performance of Tony Conrad, *Fifty-One Years on the Infinite Plain 1972–2013*,[42] Live Arts Week II, Bologna April 16, 2013. The image shows a clock, a diagram with notes and timings and a Persian rug. Photograph © Francesca Liccardi.

consider the assemblage that is drawn together in the case of assisted reproduction as described by Müller and Schurr, this assemblage includes "intended parents, egg donors, surrogates, IVF professionals, airplanes, time schedules, petri-dishes, hormonal drugs and so on."[43] It is a range of desires and wishes that come together for this assemblage to emerge. The desire of the intended parents for a baby, which is formative for this assemblage, is not the only desire or wish that is at play; instead, the desire is distributed across the assemblage. These desires and wishes include the desire for profit which is the primary driver for the clinics, and income is often the primary motivating force for surrogate mothers and egg donors although a desire to help others may also be at play. However, all this pivots on the primary desire of the would-be parents for a baby. It is this desire that "helps the intended parents overcome the logistical, financial, ethical and emotional odds involved in travelling abroad, buying egg cells and hiring surrogate mothers."[44]

In the early 1990s, working with the exhibitions team at Tate on newly commissioned works in an exhibition space at Tate Britain focusing on new work by emerging artists called Art Now, the degree to which artists would tenaciously hold to their vision to overcome complex logistical or technical problems was striking to me. It is something that is rarely examined in the discourse of contemporary art, except in occasionally sensational terms. Although this puts me in ethically uncomfortable territory by comparing the creation of babies and artworks, I am interested in exploring how this idea of desire, as articulated by Müller and Schurr, operates in relation to the assemblage around *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, an assemblage which is concerned with the continuation and legacy of this particular artwork, as well as the work of Conrad more generally.

In the initial assemblage, the one formed around the work by Conrad, the artist acted from the desire to create the artwork, and like the intended parents, he acted as the primary drive for the constitution of the assemblage. We can see each performance as bringing together an assemblage of performers, instruments, film and sound equipment, space, acoustics, sound engineers, curators, gallerists, press officers, airplanes, money, members of the estate, producers, contracts and audience members etc.

Desire is an intentional motivating force that brings together the assemblage and keeps it together for the achievement of a given end. In the cases we have been discussing those might be a baby, or the artwork, or a performance of an artwork.[45] To quote Deleuze and Guattari, "assemblages are passional, they are compositions of desire. Desire has nothing to do with a natural or spontaneous determination; there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them."[46] For Deleuze and Guattari assemblages and desire are inseparably linked.[47]

In 2017 and 2019 the museum brought into the assemblage surrounding *Ten Years Alive in the Infinite Plain* not only its own agency as collector and as a canonizing power but also its own curators, marketing teams, registrars, conservators, art handlers, technicians and strategies for the conservation, documentation, transmission and display of performance-based works of art and their audiences.

Figure 1.7 The new generation of performers using the dossier to perform *Ten Years Alive* in a closed session for the transmitters as part of the research fieldwork, Tate Liverpool, May 15, 2019. From left to right: Catherine Landen, George Maund and Emily Lansley. Photograph © Roger Sinek.

Figure 1.8 Three conservators sit with their notes interviewing the new performers of *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, while a cameraperson captures the interview on video, Tate Liverpool, May 2019. From left to right: cameraperson Will Wilkinson, Research Fellow for Time-based Media Conservation Hélia Marçal, Time-based Media Conservator Ana Ribeiro, Conservation Manager, Time-based Media Conservation Louise Lawson. In the background: producer Vanessa Peterson. Photograph © Tate, Roger Sinek.

The initial bridge between the museum and the network around *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* was the curator Andrea Lissoni, who had produced the work in Bologna on April 16, 2013 and had come to know Conrad, and then, shortly before Conrad's death, had gone to talk to him and his then gallerist Vera Alemani about the possibility of this work coming into the collection. Both Lissoni and Alemani are important instigating forces within the reconfiguration of this network or assemblage, each with their own desires and motivations.

How are we to understand the role of the artist as primary instigator of the assemblage that gathers to create and maintain the artwork and others within the assemblage that support and care for the work? To help answer this question I will draw upon the idea of charisma. Charisma is a relational property contingent on the perceiver and the context.[48] Charisma manifests as the capability of those instigators to motivate others to join the assemblage. Those joining the assemblage might have their own desires (they might earn money or prestige, or they may wish to maintain a friendship or working relationship) but charisma acts as an ability to enlist others to pursue a desire. In both cases the primary instigators of the assemblage, the parents or the artist, have a particular claim on the baby or artwork that is produced, and the assemblage is set up to succeed in that end. Success is defined as the artist or the parents being identified as such by the network. Of course, something might go wrong; a surrogate mother might refuse to give up a baby, or others in the assemblage might claim a right of authorship on the artwork.

The term charisma as used here is drawn from Max Weber's *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (first published in 1947). "The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he or she is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are not accessible to the ordinary person but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader."[49]

Building on Weber's exploration of charisma, the account I draw upon in this chapter is a study of early modern miracle workers by Lainer-Vos and Parigi, and in particular their analysis of understanding the relationship of institutions in the process of routinization that occurs in order to ensure canonization.[50] Within the scholarship of Lainer-Vos and Parigi we find an exploration of the preservation of charisma among early Christian miracle workers that offers a useful study of the preservation of charisma in other contexts as well as an account of its institutionalization. Lainer-Vos and Parigi outline how it was the task of the acolytes to preserve the charismatic status of a miracle worker, both while the miracle worker was alive and after their death, by creating opportunities for miracle making, as well as maintaining a densely connected network of diverse supporters. Leaving would-be parents aside, and substituting them for Christian miracle workers, within the dynamic of charisma it is important for the credit for the outcomes (performances or miracles) to return to a single figure, so their authority is maintained and canonized. In these accounts of

charisma, its attribution is not distributed across a network. Rather, it is singled out for the artist or miracle worker and those within the network, the museum workers or the acolytes, and context serves to construct and maintain the charisma of the artist or miracle worker.

Charismatic authority is understood to operate outside the norms of rational society, free from everyday routine,[51] and is a social relationship between those who hold charismatic authority and those who believe or follow it.[52] Charisma is a lively and sometimes unpredictable property that is vital for the enrolment of support for complex artworks that require a great deal of organization, resources and energy to be mustered each time they are performed; like desire it is a mobilizing force. Webber takes the view that charismatic authority is inherently unstable and destined to be transformed into structures of traditional authority or perish.[53]

A significant part of the study of Lainer-Vos and Parigi looks at the importance for acolytes to build a relationship to an institution, in their case the Catholic Church, as a consecrating institution.[54] The acolytes were responsible for successfully ensuring the canonization of the miracle worker by moving from charismatic authority to routinization represented by official recognition by the church. Importantly within this network, post-mortem miracles were always attributed to the original charismatic figure, shoring up their authority and ensuring the locus of the charisma remained with the dead miracle worker.

Returning to *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, while the locus of the charisma remains with Conrad even after death, the authority distributed across the different parts of the network shifts to incorporate the museum as a new player. When the work was first considered for Tate's collection in 2016 this provided a trigger for the museum to have a license to care and engage in the assemblage, impacting the existing network to form a new modified network including the museum and its staff. How are we to understand this moment of transition? I have over the last few years been thinking with colleagues about the institution of the artist's estate, which is the vehicle established as the official transition team for an artist after their death.[55] In thinking about this moment of transition there is a useful analogy to be made to early modern miracle workers in the understanding of the charismatic authority of the artist and the idea of successful transmission being predicated on the existence of a network that, on the death of the artist, becomes the transition team that has the task of brokering a relationship with structures of traditional authority. This analogy seems to fit particularly well to the case of Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain,* which was bought into Tate's collection after the artist's death, brokered by the network that surrounded the work and the artist. In the case of Conrad those who were identified as transmitters were key to the consolidation of *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*. Their authority lay in proximity to Conrad and experience of *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*. The role is quite selfless in that the authorship of the work is always pushed back to Conrad, something essential for the work to be stabilized as a museum object.

The role of the acolytes of early Christian miracle workers was to maintain the charismatic authority of the miracle worker after his death. As in the example of *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, we see something similar play out with the enduring centrality of the artist within these artworks whose performance and conservation requires the ongoing mobilization of a complex social network. The structure is set up so the locus of the charisma in the ongoing production of the work remains with the artist and continues to bolster their authority as author of the work even after their death, which serves to maintain the centrality of the artist and seems to resist a more distributed account. One of the tools used within contemporary art conservation to ensure this is the artist's interview which serves to record the intent of the artist as sole authority. Similarly, we can see a role in the museum as a canonizing authority, providing legitimacy to the artist's standing but also transforming or translating it into the structures of traditional authority.

Is this one of the ways we are to understand the transition of a performance-based artwork into the museum? On the death of the artist this relationship with the museum serves to preserve the charisma and allow the artwork to continue to hold its power and status confirmed by the charisma that continues to be conferred on the artist. The successful engagement of the museum is a sign of success for the network, organized after death primarily around the artist's estate, to ensure the continued status and reputation of the artist. Again, it is important that all charismatic acts are attributed to the central miracle worker.

As long as the charismatic authority or power is always pushed back to the artist then it can endure after the death of the artist. This charismatic authority or power it seems can also enter an object. In the introductory chapter to the book *Charismatic Objects*, Marianne Vedeler points to the mobility of charismatic power and its ability to enter an object as well as animals and humans, rendering the object "a possessor of an important collective narrative."[56] Lainer-Vos and Parigi point to the analogy to celebrity chefs where recognition from external authorities such as the Michelin Guide is key to enabling staff in multiple restaurants belonging to acclaimed celebrity chefs to produce the "culinary magic on an everyday basis, without the presence of the charismatic chef."[57] Similarly with the transfer to the museum it is important that the charisma is attributed to the artist but can also be shared, as Vedeler suggests by the charismatic object, in this case the artwork, in the canonization process. Although it also seems that in the case of the most charismatic artists, such as Joseph Beuys, what is often most palpable in exhibitions is the artist's absence. However, whether the artist is in fact present or only present through their absence, I would argue that this account of charisma provides a possible explanation of the persistence of the primacy of the figure of the artist within the contemporary art museum.

Activities of conservation are not solely the domain of conservators, and where the practices are less associated with the skills required for material maintenance and repair, the conservation of artworks becomes an endeavor that is widely shared amongst various actors. In the case of *Ten Years Alive on the*

Infinite Plain that includes past performers of the work, the maker of new long string drones and the estate for their continued documentation efforts. The relationships among those involved in previous performances of *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* permeate both this case study and help us understand not only how this work has been learned and passed on while Conrad was alive but also how this might be preserved after his death, and what might happen in the future.

The visibility of the assemblage around Conrad and its role in the continuation and conservation of the artwork made it necessary to understand the museum in relation to the dynamics of this assemblage. However there seems to be a tension between the visibility of the distributed nature of the knowledge and authority over this work and the idea of the centrality of the artist. While the account of the canonization of the miracle worker seems to fit with the dynamics of the canon-making capacity of the museum, and the need for the work to retain its status after the death of the artist, to what degree are we reinforcing an outmoded notion of artistic production within these structures? Or is this simply a reflection of the current status quo? While the agency of the assemblage might be located in its relations, the artist still plays a central role both charismatically and in their ability to instigate a certain assemblage which orbits around and realizes the artwork.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the dynamics and authority of the artist through the lens of the concepts of desire and charisma. Desire is the mobilizing force that creates the assemblage needed for a specific outcome and charisma is that which draws people to invest in that assemblage and buy into the original desire. The account of charisma and its study in relation to early Christian miracle workers also suggests an analogy to the role of the museum as canonizing authority and the transition team in terms of the assemblage and more formally the artist's estate upon the death of the artist. These analogies point to some of the mechanisms that contribute to why the centrality of the artist persists within the museum. Those within the assemblage surrounding the artwork are careful not to claim authorial rights over the work but instead push the charismatic authority back to the single author or artist. In the case of the network surrounding *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, although many members are artists in their own right, their role as part of this assemblage is in the care and support of Conrad's work, not their own artistic careers. Similarly, those supporting the work in the museum such as conservators and technicians are also troubled by any claim that they might have authorial input into the work, as this would contradict conservation ethics, and instead insist that they are working to keep the work alive.[58]

This study of Tony Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* also highlighted the importance of the knowledge held by the network which surrounds these artworks for our continued ability to perform the work and for its conservation. An enormous amount of labor goes into this work outside of the museum. In the vast majority of cases the role of the estate is to facilitate the works in the estate and the artist's archive entering institutions, not only to

raise funds, but also to harness the canonizing power of the museum—and because the assemblage is instable and hard to maintain. For example, members of the assemblage might want to focus on their own work, they become ill, they age, they take on new roles and don't have the time, they move and lose geographic proximity to others in the network, or they might simply want to move on with their lives.

I have long looked for an account of the extraordinary efforts that are mobilized by artists to realize complex works, and I have also wanted to find a better account of the transition of authority and charisma that occurs when the artist dies, an account that goes beyond a reading of the museum as simply intellectually naïve and sycophantic or points only to the market as the force that maintains this status quo. In the exploration of the concepts of desire and charisma in this chapter my aim has been to propose a different reading of the dynamics that are highlighted through the acquisition of complex artworks by the museum, especially after the death of the artist.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 Fieldnotes of Professor Harro van Lente, observing a feedback session where, as part of the project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum, we were working on the transmission of Tony Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* at Tate Liverpool in 2019. Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum is a three-year project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that works to develop both theory and practice around artworks which challenge the structures and definitions of the museum. The project involves researchers from across conservation, collection management, archives and records and curatorial within Tate. Tate, "Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum," Tate, accessed October 11, 2021, www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible.
2 Ima-Abasi Okon, "General Service Agreement between Ima-Abasi Okon and The Showroom Gallery," in ⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃⌃ (Press for Practice, 2019), 3.
3 Okon, "General Service Agreement," 3.

4 For example a pivotal concept for contemporary art conservation is that of "artist intent" which conservators seek to understand or decipher through tools such as the artist interview. The artist interview in conservation records the artist's attitudes to change and often acts as a guide, and sometimes as a means of authorizing, particular conservation strategies. For a discussion of artist's intent in conservation see Glenn Wharton, "Artist Intention and the Conservation of Contemporary Art," in *Objects Specialty Group Postprints*, ed. E. Hamilton and K. Dodson, 2015, 22: 1–12.

5 For a discussion of the artist interview see Fernando Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life: Ecologies of the Modern Imagination at the Art Museum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), in particular chapter 1.3, "The Modern Subject of Care,", 116–144.

6 For example, Bill Viola's *Five Angels for the Millennium* (2001), was acquired with very detailed specifications for the display space, the quality and dimensions of the images, the positioning of the entrances and exits, the lighting and the acoustics. Artists often authorize one official image of their work and are very precise about how the image is cropped, etc. An example would be the authorization of the use of one image for James Coleman's Charon MIT Project, 1989. The artist Phil Collins has specified that the 2004 work *they shoot horses* cannot be shown in Israel or the USA without permission of the artist and Tania Bruguera has specified that *Tatlin's Whisper #5* (2008) can only be performed in a location that has experienced civil unrest and protest and where the police control crowds using horses. The long string drone acquired with Tony Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* can be replaced and part of what was acquired were the instructions for its fabrication. Sol LeWitt and his estate specify to the owners of Sol LeWitt works who is authorized to create his wall drawings.

7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1987).

8 Part of the motivation for this chapter were conversations with Professor Haidy Geismar during her Fellowship at Tate as part of the project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum.

9 For accounts of the role of love in relation to museum practices see Emily Pringle, "Art Practice, Learning and Love: Collaboration in Challenging Times," (London: Tate, 2014), www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-learning/working-papers/art-practice-learning-love, accessed February 27, 2021, and Anthony Huberman, "Take Care," in *Circular Facts*, ed. Mai Abu Eldahab, Bina Choi and Emily Pethick (London: Sternberg Press, 2012), 9–18.

10 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

11 Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," In *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), 138–50.

12 Tate was the first contemporary art museum to acquire live performance when it acquired Tino Sehgal's *This is Propaganda* (2002) in 2005 and Roman Ondak's *Good Feelings in Good Times* (2003) also accessioned into the collection in 2005.

13 "Delegated performance" is Claire Bishop's term for performances that are carried out by someone other than the artist. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso Books, 2012).

14 *Time* (2020) and *Time* (1970) are not considered by the artist to be one work that has evolved over time. Instead, David Lamelas considers *Time* (2020) to be a new work, as the although the two performances can be seen as quite similar, the medium and the context are different. Personal Communication with the gallery Jan Mot, September 24, 2022.

15 See Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life,* for an examination of mimeographic labor in the museum and Fernando Domínguez Rubio, "On the Discrepancy Between Objects and Things: An Ecological Approach," *Journal of Material Culture* 21, no. 1 (2016): 59–86, for a discussion about how the museum maintains an artwork as legible as the same work over time.

16 "Hans Ulrich Obrist: Brandon Joseph…argued that you seek to annihilate the idea of the score instead of realizing it. Tony Conrad: Annihilate, yes. My idea was to eliminate the social and cultural function of the score as a site. As a cultural site altogether. Period." Hans Ulrich Obrist and Lionel Bovier, eds., *A Brief History of New Music* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP/Ringier and Les Presses du Réel, 2014), 194.

17 Maria Palacios Cruz, interview by Lucy Bayley, Pip Laurenson and Hélia Marçal, August 10, 2019.

18 Maria Palacios Cruz, interview by Lucy Bayley, Pip Laurenson and Hélia Marçal, August 10, 2019.

19 Stefaan Quix, "Tony Conrad – Brussels," email exchange with Dr. Lucy Bayley, December 13, 2021.

20 Conrad died on April 9, 2016.

21 One of these academic observers was Professor Harro van Lente whose quotation from his field notes opens this chapter.

22 My thinking is here influenced by a lineage of thinkers starting with Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), which was first introduced into contemporary conservation theory by Vivian van Saaze in her book *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2013). See also Jane Bennett's description the agency of assemblages and "thing power" in Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (London and Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), chapter two. Also important in this space is the work of Donna Haraway, in particular *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Picking up this work through a focus on care is María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

23 Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142–48.

24 Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1981): 118.

25 See Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester University Press, 2008); Rebecca Deroo, *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art: The Politics of Artistic Display in France after 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

26 For the Art Workers' Coalition's complete Statement of Demands from March 1970, see "ART WORKERS' COALITION: STATEMENT OF DEMANDS," accessed October 10, 2021, http://theoria.art-zoo.com/art-workers-coalition-statement-of-demands.

27 For example, the adoption in the US of the Visual Artists Rights Act of 1990 was the first federal copyright legislation to grant protection to the moral rights of artist. In the UK the Copyright and Designs and Patents Act of 1988 also added moral rights of integrity and attribution.

28 Examples of the literature on artist intent include Steven W. Dykstra, "The Artist's Intentions and The Intentional Fallacy in Fine Arts Conservation," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 35, no. 3 (Autumn - Winter, 1996): 197–218; Rebecca Gordon and Erma Hermens, "The Artist's Intent in Flux," *CeROArt. Conservation, exposition, restauration d'Objets d'Art*, no. HS (September 11, 2013); Nina Quabeck, "The Artist's Intent in Contemporary Art: Matter and Process in Transition" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2019), https://theses.gla.ac.uk/75173; Glenn Wharton, "Artist Intention and the Conservation of Contemporary Art," *Objects Specialty Group Postprints*, vol. 22 (2015): 13. In terms of practice within museums, consider for example the new spaces within the design of SFMOMA called the Collections Workroom that supports collaborations between artists, scholars and the museum staff. See "The Artist Initiative," accessed October 11, 2021, www.sfmoma.org/artists-artworks/research/artist-initiative.

29 For an account of their work with Ima-Abasi Okon see Libby Ireland, "Learning through the Acquisition and Display of Works by Ima-Abasi Okon: Enacting Radical Hospitality through Deliberate Slowness," *Tate Papers*, no. 35, 2022, www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/35/learning-through-acquisition-display-works-by-ima-abasi-oko n-enacting-radical-hospitality-through-deliberate-slowness, accessed January 29, 2023; and Jack McConchie, "'Nothing Comes Without its World:' Learning to Love the Unknown in the Conservation of Ima-Abasi Okon's Artworks," *Tate Papers*, no. 35, 2022, www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/35/learning-to-love-the-unknown-conserva tion-ima-abasi-okon-artworks, accessed January 29, 2023.

30 For a detailed examination of the conception of the modernist artist, see Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

31 Consider, for example, the video outputs from Tate Shots many of which focus on the artist in their studio. An example is "Maggie Hambling – 'Every Portrait is Like a Love Affair,' Artist Interview, Tate Shots," 2018, accessed October 11, 2021, https://youtu.be/M4-4Syn1pmE.

32 See Libby Ireland, "Learning through the Acquisition and Display of Works by Ima-Abasi Okon: Enacting Radical Hospitality through Deliberate Slowness," Tate Papers, no. 35, 2022, www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/35/learning-through-acquisition-display-works-by-ima-abasi-okon-enacting-radical-hospitality-through-deliberate-slowness, accessed January 29, 2023.

33 By using the term "dynamic network" I am pointing to the fact that the network around an artwork is not fixed but constantly adjusting to changing circumstances. In the case of the network around Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*, the network shifted as people entered or left the network due to illness, a desire to pursue their own art, authority being confirmed or denied.

34 Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*.

35 Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life*; see also Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 79–82.

36 Donna J. Haraway and Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, "Nothing Comes Without Its World: Donna J. Haraway in Conversation with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve 20th Anniversary of Modest_Witness 1," in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouseTM*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

37 Quoted in Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 103.

38 As part of her academic fellowship the anthropologist Haidy Geismar encouraged a small group made up of Hélia Marçal, Lucy Bayley and myself to consciously work to decenter Conrad in the network that surrounded the work, with the purpose of questioning the central position given to the artist within accounts of contemporary art production. This thought experiment allowed us to spend time with the dynamics of this assemblage, in particular thinking about the agency of all the desires or wishes that were driving the network around Conrad's *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain*.

39 Martin Müller and Carolin Schurr, "Assemblage Thinking and Actor-network Theory: Conjunctions, Disjunctions, Cross-Fertilisations," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 3 (July 2016): 217–29.

40 Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (Sage Publications, 1996).

41 Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari*, 4.

42 While Conrad was alive the title of the piece would change to reflect the number of years since the work was first performed plus 10, so in 2013, 51 years. On the death of Conrad, within the context of the work entering Tate's collection the title reverted to *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* and was given the single date of 1972, implying greater fixity than was present in the way in which the title of the work was constructed while Conrad was alive.

43 Müller and Schurr, "Assemblage Thinking," 217–29.

44 Müller and Schurr, "Assemblage Thinking," 224.

45 For a full discussion of the relationship between musical works and specific performances see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: University Press, 1994) and Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration / Stephen Davies* (Oxford: Clarendon, Clarendon Press, 2001). However, my point here is a rather simple one: it could be argued that as a work without a score *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* did not exist as a work until it was performed, and desire as an intentional motivational force is required to bring about the assemblage required for this performance and for this work to exist.

46 Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 465.

47 For a detailed analysis of the development of Deleuze's thinking about desire see Jihai Gao, "Deleuze's Conception of Desire," *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 7, no. 3 (2013): 406–20, https://doi.org/10.3366/dls.2013.0120.

48 Eva Haifa Giraud, *What Comes after Entanglement? Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 126.

49 Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 1964), 358–359.

50 Dan Lainer-Vos and Paolo Parigi, "Miracle Making and the Preservation of Charisma," *Social Science History*, vol. 38, no. 3–4 (2014): 455–81.

51 David C., Hofmann and Lorne L. Dawson, "The Neglected Role of Charismatic Authority in the Study of Terrorist Groups and Radicalization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 4, (2014): 348–68. Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947).

52 Pierre Bourdieu, "Legitimation and Structured Interests in Weber's Sociology of Religion," in *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*, ed. Scott Lash and Sam Whimster (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 119–36; M. Rainer Lepsius, "Max Weber's Concept of Charismatic Authority and Its Applicability to Adolf Hitler's 'Führerstaat,'" in *Max Weber and Institutional Theory*, ed. M. Rainer Lepsius and Claus Wendt (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 89–109, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44708-7_8.

53 Lainer-Vos and Parigi, "Miracle Making and the Preservation of Charisma," 455–81. See also Weber, *Essays in Sociology*.

54 Lainer-Vos and Parigi, "Miracle Making and the Preservation of Charisma."

55 This group is called the Lacunae Network and is led by Christoph Rausch and Vivian van Saaze at Maastricht University. Its founding members include Anna Schäffler, Renée van de Vall, Mark Waugh, Dorothee Wimmer, Lydia Berkens, Miriam Windhausen, Meike Hopp and myself. The transition that is being referred to is a transition of authority away from the artist and to a formally (which would form the artist's estate) or informally designated group. The role of an artist's estate is to ensure the recognition of the artist by securing their work and often their archive within an institution. The concept of a 'transition team' is an idea developed by Jill Sterrett.

56 Marianne Vedeler, "The Charismatic Power of Objects," in *Charismatic Objects: From Roman Times to the Middle Ages*, ed. Marianne Vedeler, Ingunn M. Røstad, Elna Siv Kristoffersen and Zanette T. Glørstad (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2018).

57 Lainer-Vos and Parigi, "Miracle Making and the Preservation of Charisma," 457.

58 For a discussion of professional ethics and invisibility see Zoë Miller, "Practitioner (In)Visibility in the Conservation of Contemporary Art," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 60, no. 2–3 (September 23, 2021): 1–13. See also Tate, "Tony Conrad – Keeping an Artwork Alive | Tate, 2020," www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9NpaIX6CiQ, accessed October 11, 2021.

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2   Not, yet

When our art is in our hands

Rebecca Schneider and Hanna B. Hölling

Hanna B. Hölling: In a previous interview with Diana Taylor, you expressed that performance studies could be perceived as putting ideas into play.[1] Building on that, I'd like to think with you about two ideas: The conservation of performance and the performance of conservation. The first idea thinks of performance as a sort of "conservation object," while the second applies the techniques of performance studies to the apparatus of conservation. In other words, how can these concepts, of conserving performance and performing conservation, be put into play?

   Rebecca Schneider: I love that you offer conservation of performance and conservation as performance as two ways of spinning the question of how performance-based art, or any art for that matter, can be given to endure. You say that "conservation of performance" thinks of performance-based works as "conservation objects." It is interesting to me to think about performance as object—while that has not always been a common performance studies perspective, it is certainly embedded in some lines of thought, especially in the Black radical tradition, such as Fred Moten's amazing work on "resistance of the object" in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003).[2] One question that arises for me when thinking about preservation is whether performance *must* be approached as an object in order to be preservable? This harkens back to the by now well-worn question that has sometimes arisen in performance studies about the desirability of preservation, that is, the question of whether archives, preservation and performance are antithetical—but let's put that thorny question aside in this conversation.[3] Let's just ask about performance as an object. If performance can be approached as an object, what kind of object is it? If I think of gesture as an object—such as the wave of a hand to indicate "hello"—am I thinking of it as composed of matter that, as matter, coheres across time? We could say that this gestural object is flesh and it coheres or is conserved across time through resurgence—Marcel Mauss's famous "iterability."[4] By this logic, flesh in/as performance can be considered an object by virtue of the repetition of its material instantiation in and across time. Its capacity for iteration, which is the same as its capacity for reiteration, pronounces a kind of endurance we generally have granted to objects in distinction to embodied live actions.

But obviously bodies are material, and, like other objects (such as commodities) have been rendered fungible and submitted to dehumanization (the human/thing binary and its racial history being a particularly noxious problem that drags the afterlives of slavery, imperialism and the ongoing capitalism of the Plantationocene wherever it goes, rendering some bodies more precarious than other bodies).[5] One thing that interests me when approaching performance as object is the issue not only of varying fleshly costs to objecthood, but also the issue of varying time scales. If we can look at performance as object, granting iterability a kind of materiality, and if we can recognize a hand wave (mine, yours) *as an object made of flesh that recurs and does not necessarily congeal into a sovereign body but jumps across bodies in time*, does our gesture begin to share something with other material objects that cohere or are recognizable as objects in a world of objects in time? To look at performance as object, we likely have to employ varying time scales to varying iterative materials. After all, isn't iterability, and endurance through a kind of material coherence, true of all objects in some respect? All objects, given to materialization, cohere and decay and possibly recohere at different temporal rates. Acknowledging this, can all objects, such as my gesture but also such as something like the Venus Willendorf, be said to engage in the dynamic playfield of appearance/disappearance/reappearance that marks performance? Perhaps what I have been asking is whether *all* objects to some degree cohere as performance? Aren't all objects time-based art (without at all wanting to say that all objects, and all enfleshments, are the same)?

Hölling: You have raised some extraordinarily important questions here. In my opinion, reframing performance as "an object of conservation" could help us to situate performance in a long tradition of preserved objects, without necessarily implying that performance is an object or material entity, or performance detritus[6]— you have elsewhere identified the latter as an amassment of matter composed not only of the carefully safeguarded fragment but also of the unintended deposit, sediment, or rubble. Conservation historians may interpret the term "object of conservation" as referring not only the long tradition of mending and repair of physical stuff such as statues, pictures, murals and chairs, but also as the object of scientific analysis and material studies that, in the late nineteenth century in Europe, helped elevate restoration from a craftsmanship to a quasi-exact science. Significant developments occurred in Western conservation in the twentieth century, during which the first conservation theories were formulated by humanities scholars, both within and outside the profession. Today, conservation is understood as both a discourse and socio-technological practice that is characterized by its plurality, diversity and sociality. It is concerned with temporal and relational matter. As an epistemic and knowledge-building activity, conservation positions the "object of conservation" as an "epistemic object" that arises from material and technological practices that ensure its continuity.[7] For historians of science, epistemic objects are in a constant state of evolution; they are marked by an infinite potential. As an epistemic object, the conservation object has the capacity to continually acquire new properties and modify itself. Thus, these objects can

never be fully themselves. Indeed, objects about which knowledge can never be fully attained are not objects but rather processes or performances that unfold and change over time.[8]

As you have mentioned, an object coheres or repeats on different time scales. We might then think of an object as a slow performance and performance as a quickly happening object that, as you have persuasively proposed, coheres and decays at different rates of resolution/dissolution. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's distinction between spatial art (e.g. painting) and temporal art (e.g. music)[9] is once again challenged: Spatial art has similar qualities to temporal art and might be viewed as slow rather than fast. Moreover, this temporal perspective enables us to identify the artwork's active and passive responses to time and the distinct ways in which various media undergo change. Artworks that actively engage with time, such as media installations, performance and events, experience faster change, while slower artworks like paintings and sculptures passively respond to time, as evidenced by the gradual yet steady degradation, decay and ageing of their physical materials. Objects and actions appear, again and again, as modulation and condensation of matter that radiates/moves at varying pace. But I would like to think more about the idea of gesture with you.

Schneider: To me, it is interesting that gesture is relational, even conceptually antiphonal, that is, iterable and open to the potential for response. If we apply the aesthetic of antiphony (or, better, call and response) to all objects and approach them as populating a reverberant world in which objects are "colleagues," or in which objects, persons, and objects-as-persons "inter(in)animate" each other, then does a playing field for conservation widen?[10] If gestures are objects and objects gestures—or are gestural—how does the scene of conservation amplify or extend its aims? Or, how does it change?

Hölling: Yes, to think about gesture is to imagine it being passed on through flesh and repetition. It involves recognizing its capacity to be reiterated as something always already citing, drawing from the past as always essentially reemergent, but also opening out toward something coming. However, does this reemergence qualify as a form of conservation? Does the ability to (re)iterate, which gestures towards both the past and the future as in the recursive "re-" and "pre-" enactment, pronounce a different kind of endurance, that, for us, functions as conservation, though it may not for others?

Perhaps exploring the notion of authenticity, or even better, identity, can shed light on the matter at hand. The debates surrounding authenticity delve into the manner in which an object, such as a chair or a mural, must meet specific identity criteria to be regarded as *that* particular chair or mural. (This raises the question of who determines these criteria.) In conservation, two theories of identity have recently come to the forefront. The first one asserts that an object—an artwork or an object of material culture—retains its identity only if all its constituent parts remain the same over time (with some physical alteration being acceptable). Examples of artworks that might adhere to this "mereological" theory are plenty: Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, Michelangelo's *David*, and the majority of artworks that inhere in one individual manifestation

and whose continuity is evident in their material structure linked to the artist's autographic mark. The second theory of identity circumvents the issue of the numerical sameness of things over time. This theory is based on intuition and assumes that objects maintain their identity by tracing a continuous path through space-time. As long as an object sustains its form and shape, the gradual exchange of constituent components does not affect its identity, which is sustained through time.[11] The wooden Shinto shrine in Ise, Japan, exemplifies spatio-temporal continuity. The shrine has been disassembled and rebuilt of new materials every twenty years for 1,300 years, thereby proving that its identity does not necessarily depend on the sameness of material components. This ritual of periodic reconstruction—*shikinen sengū*—preserves not the material aspect of a specific piece of architecture, but an ancient building tradition.[12]

In some instances, these two distinct perceptions of identity intersect in complex works such as multimedia installations, where an artwork's sculptural elements might remain physically unchanged while other elements, such as living plants or television monitors, are repeatedly replaced. Examples of such works can be found in Nam June Paik's eco-electronic ensembles. More recently, the type-token distinction and the idea of multiple centers have been applied to further destabilize the perception of an authentic, original work.[13] Despite these efforts, Western conservation still relies merely on the tacit agreement that the authentic work is a physical object that aligns with the material sameness and that this object is contingent on the involvement of the author-originator—an artistic genius guided by clearly definable intention. For works based on instruction, score or notation, and whose continuity is intermittent rather than physically continuous, the understanding of authenticity in relation to physical sameness is challenged.[14] Conservators have coined the term "expressive authenticity"[15] or "integrity" to refer to the preservation of an artwork. However, this still raises a similar question of who is entitled to decide about the aspects of sameness or difference and how these decisions are influenced by the prevailing cultural and knowledge systems in conservation—or what I refer to as the episteme of conservation.[16] Today, we recognize that each conservation decision reinforces and upholds axiological systems that have historically favored Western values or what Ariella Aïsha Azoulay names the "imperial modality of art."[17] It is therefore crucial to acknowledge not only that the artwork/object undergoes changes and that the concept of authenticity is fluid, but also that the pluriversum of conservation—a vast range of conservation cultures—must incorporate principles different from those upheld by Western museums.

Returning to the notion of the object: What if we replaced "object" with "performance" in the phrase "the object of conservation"? Accordingly, rather than of "the object of conservation," wouldn't we speak of "the performance of conservation"? This experiment reintroduces, almost tautologically, the conservation action, the very act through which the work is conserved.

Schneider: Thank you for the reminder that performance, and the questions for conservation that it still raises, might continue to help us think deeply about

the "imperial modality of art" that Azoulay unpacks. I think it is important to name that imperial modality as explicitly tied to white, liberal humanist Enlightenment traditions, in order to remember that the so-called West contains many otherwise modalities (and "genres of human") upon which we might draw.[18] But yes, as you suggest, let's talk about the flip of your opening equation: conservation as performance. If one way to think about artwork is that all "objects," whether composed of flesh or water or wood or stone (and you see that I am still working with what it can mean to consider performance an object, despite you saying that is not what you meant!), each cohere and decay according to different time scales, and if objects thus perform or in some way *gesture* by virtue of moving in and across time, then perhaps to conserve any object is to enter into a relationship with an ongoing in-time performance, no matter the materiality of composition. To conserve is to enter an ongoing or syncopated performance as a participant capable of and indeed engaged in "response-ability" (extending the call and response trope).[19]

Another way to say this, thinking with performance, is that working across time to conserve an object is entering into a relationship with that object—creating an object/conservator assemblage of multiple materialities in multiple time. If the conservator is (or the conservators are) live, and, we assume, flesh-based, then would the ongoing conservator/object assemblage be live art? If the object is performance and, say, composed of flesh-based dance (that is, bio bodies dancing in time), then the conservator dances as well, or sets the dance on other bodies, or otherwise decides about/enables flesh-to-flesh transmission. But if the object is stone? Well then, so too the conservator dances—or has an embodied and often highly choreographed intra-action with the stone-based object that is performing in geologic time.

Clearly what a conservator may achieve in a conservation-minded co-performance with an object may not only be an object's material preservation for its on-stage and back-stage life *as material*, but the preservation of the *conditions* for engagement with said object *as* performance, as gesture, as sculpture, as painting, that is, as reverberant actant in a playfield that is always wider than the object itself, both in time and in space. A conservator's performance is also participant in the broader preservation of the conditions for and the (ritualized) cultural investment in conservation itself. As is often noted, your performance, as conservator, takes place usually backstage in a *theater* designed for cross-temporal access, and your decisions concern the environmental theater of engagement by which the object's gesture (say, the artwork that is my hand wave) can reverberate in an antiphonal relationship with the art object's cross-temporal participants. Of course, it's fascinating when preservation as performance is put center stage rather than backstage, as I recently witnessed in Ghent where the preservation of the Van Eyck Altarpiece was open to the public for certain hours of working days. Here "theater" takes its meaning as site for action, such as theater of surgery, theater of war. The theater of preservation is an operating theater, and the objects and conservators are the stage *hands* in tightly choreographed gestures of intra(in)animation.

Hölling: The "theater of preservation" as site for action implies the involvement of scripts, texts and actors-actants possibly (re)engaging in the acts of care. Theater of surgery connotes medical metaphors that frequently depict conservators as individuals responsible for sustaining the life of objects under their care, utilizing advanced technology for treatment and examination. This representation positions conservators as similar to doctors in terms of their attire (e.g. white gowns and scalpels at hand), the length of education, and approach to treating objects as if they were patients.[20] Conservation narratives, which serve as connectors of the different temporalities of artworks and provide reasoning for decisions made, can support the textual dimension of the theater (my concept of the conservation narrative leans on Paul Ricoeur's narrative theory).[21] In addition, it is worthwhile to examine in greater depth the potential of the theater for restaging, that is, for a (ritualized?) repetition of a scripted play.

Let us delve further into the subject of time for another moment: Conservation with its sense of knowing (that is the way in which it metabolizes and creates different forms of knowledge) not only provides new perspectives on the work of art and its world, but also yields insights into its own formation of identity. Traditional conservation was thought to "return" a work of art to its past state, often seen as singular, originating from the artist—and even mythic—while making it available for the future. Although such views are rare amongst conservators today, the original past (including the artwork's initial instantiations) still underpins the discourse, implicitly shaping decisions about the artwork's future.

How can we challenge the temporal relationship that conservation has established between the present and the future, which assumes a linear and progressive notion of time? How can we introduce the idea of cross-temporal liveness and duration? Your brilliant proposal of understanding time as porous and having cross-temporal conversations shares commonalities with my own perspective on time as duration, inspired by the philosopher Henri Bergson. Performance is an excellent subject of study precisely because it defies the linear progression of time and embodies heterochrony.

Schneider: I agree with your insight that the degree to which we think of artworks as objects that undergo transformation and as objects with "many different pasts" requires us to "abandon" (your word again) the search for authenticity as existing in the past only. You invite us to question how authenticity might be a matter of change. That's really a radical idea. It's exciting to think about how an object's authenticity might actually be in some deferred time, some future or other time. This point of view may be more comfortable for those who study theater than for those who study art history ("performance" is poised somewhat uncomfortably between the two, as the work of Shannon Jackson has long explicated[22]). Consider the deferral machine that is a script, for example. The "authenticity" of theater is always off of the script and into the queasy and always variable future of its (re)enactment. But isn't that the same, *at least to some degree*, for other arts? Photography, for example, is constitutionally deferred in time both forward and back (and, some might want to say,

to the side). You have written elsewhere that this cross-temporal dynamic "moves conservation away from its attempt to manage change (measured in an artwork's former conditions) and toward a process intervening in the artwork's temporality."[23] I'd love to hear more from you on that.

Hölling: I believe that artworks construct in the present a durational identity that "contains" many different pasts. This aligns with Bergson's concept of duration, and I'm delighted that we share a passion for it. Duration refers to the survival of the past, in which the past exists alongside the present.[24] According to Bergson, duration is an ever-accumulating ontological memory that is wholly, automatically and ceaselessly preserved. The duration of the current moment does not depose the moment that came before. Following this concept, in works that have the capacity to reoccur rather than endure, the present might be conceived of as the survival of the past. In other words, the past is actualized in the present—the only temporality to which we have unmediated access. Duration offers an alternative to traditional views of time (such as the Aristotelian inheritance, progressive linearity and chronology, including its figuration/diagrammatization, that historically governed conservation. The attachment of conservation to the authentic condition, the return of a work to its original intended state, and even the concept of restoration—conservation's older sibling—demonstrate its adherence to a concept of time as a line (even if the timeline is "reversed," as in *re*storation). If we replace this conventional understanding of time with *durée*, the works' changeability will no longer be punctuated by singular conditions and states. Instead, they will exist unrestricted in a continuum, in which each instantiation of a work preserves the previous ones and simultaneously anticipates those that occur in the future.[25] Shifting to Husserl, we can envision continuity as a state where each moment of protention becomes a retention of the next.[26] And, in a similar vein, you suggest that that re-enactment is, in fact, a form of pre-enactment. Therefore, if artworks create a durational identity in the present that "contains" many different pasts, conservation can only be seen as an action that modifies and interprets objects by introducing ruptures, intervals and intermissions into what would otherwise be a continuum. Such a reorientation of conservation would move away from the attempts to "reclaim the past" or "restore the original" or "return the authentic object"—all of which rely on the concept of linear time that is explicitly or implicitly present even in contemporary conservation theories. However, we could also consider the possibility that conservation, instead of intervening in the work, can coexist with the artwork as a set of responsible practices that co-inhabit the time and space of these heterochronous works.

Schneider: The idea of "responsible practices" is resonant with antiphony. If we lift out the Latin root of responsible—"*respondere*" (answer in return)—to what degree is a conservator's responsibility to "answer an object *in return*"? (And just a note in case it's not overly obvious to our readers by now, we decided to create this chapter as a talking-with to formally engage a kind of call and response into our thought.) This of course implies that an object has also

called. Or might call. Or might, in turn, respond. To think with antiphony might suggest that an object may have called and answered in a cross-hatch of historical encounters that reverberate. What part of an object is, in fact, the remains and returns of the flesh that has handled it? This question is not unrelated to the insights of paleoanthropologists that the human is an assemblage of hand and tool and that, with Leroi-Gourhan, the tool is not a tool without the hand just as the hand is not a hand without the tool.[27] The "scriptive thing" that is the tool requires the component part, the hand, to be the object that it is.[28] And so it is a flesh machine. But so too, flesh is an object machine. To conserve an object (and to conserve flesh) is to conserve a broader field of interinanimate component parts. This way of thinking again puts us in the realm of thinking with performance-based assemblage.

To acknowledge that an object's very objecthood is punctuated by the intervals between and among its (re)appearances, and between and among itself and the bodies it interpellates or hails as co-participants, is to acknowledge changeability as a kind of core. To what degree does ritual keep that changeability at bay? Is encounter (and its repetitions) a kind of artifact that can be preserved as ritual or ceremony, thus bearing something that might be kin to what Amiri Baraka, writing about jazz, called the "changing same"?[29] Can choreography regarding the object-flesh assemblage take a shape that preserves the artifact of/as encounter, even as changeability is the given condition where flesh time meets geologic time, paint time, clay time, wood time, etc.?

When we ask what it might mean to *conserve change* as essential to objecthood what are we asking? Conserving change can mean something as simple as preserving the conditions for engagement with an object given that engagement is always in time and variable over time. Here I am reminded of Robert Joseph's discussion of the more-than-human masks of the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation of the Pacific Northwest. Chief Joseph is eloquent about the downtime of the wood and paint masks, which are acknowledged as having "a life of their own."[30] In fact, the masks dance the people, rather than the common settler-colonial assumption that it is humans who make masks dance. When they are not dancing the people, the masks are kept guarded and also hidden away. These are objects whose power moves in and out of performance-based engagements with the human beings who preserve the masks along with preserving the traditions of their animacy. In this, the humans, too, are preserved by the preservation of the masks. Many questions arise when thinking with this kind of performance-based object (and again, perhaps all objects are performance-based). I suspect we could here agree that all objects in human constellations have histories and traditions of use despite the fact that some objects, due to violence such as colonial plunder, have been robbed of those traditions and appropriated into other ritual traditions that preserve them differently (preserving them according to rituals of commodified Western art, say, rather than rituals of potlatch, etc.). We are likely more comfortable acknowledging the human history of an object's use than we are acknowledging the co-participation, or actancy, of an object or thing in its intra-action with humans. We

usually assume that it is the humans who are responsible for the actions and conditions of objects and not the objects themselves or, better, the assemblage that is objects and persons. In the Kwakwaka′wakw ritual of the Potlatch, there are demands made by the "object" itself upon the other actants who engage with it, and as Chief Joseph relates, even while hidden when not on display an object can wield an incredible power. I am speaking of more than simply honoring an object as the object demands. I am suggesting in addition that what is preserved may also be a ritual assemblage. I am saying that part of what constitutes the object itself is its fleshly relations and the constellation of those relations is co-determined by the (ritual) object and the (ritual) participants that engage it, whether in a museum or a gallery, a temple, private dwelling, or a Kwakwaka′wakw big house. We are made by our objects just as much as we make our objects. Or said another way, we make our objects, but, simultaneously, the objects we make make us.

Hölling: To "conserve" the changeability of such objects—or objects in or as their changeability—might thus require decisions related to the cultivation of their actancy. If the new conservation is to rely on the expanded concepts of human and nonhuman agency, the crucial question must be, How is it being done? Does conservation of agential objects mean allowing them to fully dictate their conditions of care? Would conservation shift entirely into a performative paradigm, leaving aside the dead matter of fixity and authenticity? It couldn't get more interesting.

Schneider: Wow. That is quite a suggestion. Sometimes being a provocateur is terrifying, right, because you don't necessarily want to suggest that, as you say, "conservation shift entirely into a performative paradigm, leaving aside the dead matter of fixity and authenticity." I mean, we need fixity and authenticity, we need citation and reference to the past, we need preservation. But we need to stop thinking of performance, change, difference and mobility as the enemy of fixity and authenticity, when sometimes what is fixed is the fact that something changes. Or what is authentic is the process of working in and through difference. In addition, rather than saying that "conservation shift entirely into a performative paradigm," I think what I am saying is actually that *conservation is already that*. I am saying that conservation is a performance-based practice and already operates *vis-à-vis* a performative paradigm (performative in that it brings into being something that it, as a practice, determines to be preservation). Different genres of human, different modes of sociality, have different means, different epistemes as you say, for the mutual, interinanimate rituals through which we (re)perform our object/flesh relations and thereby (re)manifest the cultural norms those rituals preserve. If conservation is already practice-based, what would happen to performance-as-conservation-object if we shift slightly to see conservation as already having been preserving performance—preserving particular rituals that manifest particular cultural object relations? Maybe nothing would change. But, the archive is, after all, a theater—right? It is a house full of repertoires—rules and regulations choreographing the live approach to this or that object, this or that score, this or that

enfleshed enactment. It is a place for action—the action of preserving. The archive has performance-based rules of access. There are live bodies performing in the archive *all the time*. So, if the museum or the gallery or the catacombs or the wall or the plinth or the frame are already performance spaces, then perhaps not as much changes in our orientation as it might, at first, seem. When we think of our houses of preservation as already theaters, and our bodies as already dancing highly choreographed dances with things, is it just a leap-in-kind to include bodies, flesh and cross-temporal time-based actions in the mix? To do that, though, we have to radically recalibrate our ideas about difference (which I can speak to later).

Hölling: You mentioned the importance of preservation, citation and reference to the past. This brings to mind the work of the late David Lowenthal, whom I had the privilege of knowing as a friend and mentor. In his Harvard Baxter lecture, Lowenthal argued that conservation is a fundamental need of human beings, essential for our physical and mental survival.[31] We define ourselves by our possessions, and the ownership of these things makes us who we are. However, the constant accumulation of objects and the exponential growth of archives highlights the absurdity of our contemporary moment, in which preservation is overtaking us. Holding onto everything suffocates us, and although oblivion may not be desirable, it is necessary. Several architectural scholars share this view. Reframing the act of preservation as a performative act and a dynamic theater of performing bodies may be helpful, as it moves away from fixity and supports change. This approach also acknowledges the diversity of bodies and minds engaged in the performance of preservation, and how they perform differently.

Let us return to the topic of time for a moment. Conservation is about time, not only because it is concerned with objects that are heterotemporal, but because it is also fundamentally rooted in time. Its essence is time. Conservation also has the power to reroute the past and reshape what it is supposed to conserve. Can we reconceptualize matter as something unfolding? By embracing the performative paradigm, we can appreciate artworks, not as isolated events that already happened, but as entities that are continuously happening, accumulating traces and stories and gesturing at us cross-temporally and -spatially?

Schneider: Yes, I very much like the Bergsonian idea of duration as continual folding of multiple temporal registers in relation—past, present, future. Time for Bergson is both heterogeneous and simultaneous. So to think of an artwork as happening, continually, seems right. Its "now" is multiple, just as our now, in which we encounter the object, is multiple as well. "We" all bring our multiple and ongoing, porously leaky nows to the event of our mutual encounters. By "we" all, I mean to include the objects. Objects bring a lot, clearly, as you have said. And conceiving of them as beings that bring, or things that gesture, or as parts of ongoing durational events might help us remember that conservation is a live art. Perhaps conservation is about preserving the condition for the reiterability of the gesture—the call and response-ability—constellated by the (performance) object or the (object) performance. For clearly conservation is not only cross-temporal but also cross-material. By this I mean, a hand is composed of

flesh—so I'm also interested in what happens when a fleshy hand works to conserve an object made of some other material. Is the assemblage of conservator (flesh) and artwork (non-flesh) actually constituent of the artwork? Afterall, flesh returns, at periodic intervals, across the lifetime of any piece. Think of the hand of the quarry laborer, or of the artist, of the mover, of the janitor, of the student, of the patron, of the conservator, etc. It is certainly part of the object's changing past as artworks pass hand to hand, as it were, coming to be known as art objects precisely through fleshy exchange. Even with a thin sheet of plastic masking the hand, it is a hand that handles nonetheless. So my question becomes, are conservators' hands, and *handling* in itself, actually *component parts* of the artwork? Are art patrons component parts of an artwork? Are students, janitors, museum goers, passersby component parts?

The question recalls a favorite passage of mine from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*: "The passing faces on the street seem [...] to multiply the indecipherable and nearby secret of the monument."[32] This quotation, by my interpretation, gives away the fact that it is the passerby who constitutes the monument as such and so, we might say, becomes a component part of the monument *qua* monument.

In this line of thinking, are conservators' hands part of the changing same that is the *event* of the endurance of any piece, no matter the material? We can think, here again, about the Venus Willendorf, an object made to be nomadic and travel by means of hands. Would not a human hand be a component part, then, of the object made to move? And how is that *dance* preserved? To talk in the language of dance or other time-based behaviors is not actually so odd. A conservator is trained, after all, in behavior—how wood "behaves," how metals behave, etc., or in Robert Joseph's example, how a powerful mask behaves.[33]

Hölling: I love the idea of a human hand as an integral part of the object danced. In "Slough Media" (Slough Media, Hand in Rock in Hand) you allude to Husserl's philosophy, where the hand that touches is also the hand being touched.[34] Consequently, conservation, when extending hands to its object, co-becomes with the object. Conservation no longer solely exerts agency or actancy over the object touched, but responds to the call of the object by co-becoming with it. It is no longer one or the other, but "each becomes each other."[35] One might wonder whether a conservation tool, such as a tweezer or a microscope, instead of being a prosthetic extension of a bio-body, prosthetically extends the (conservation) object.[36] Such as shift in perspective would have profound implications for the well-established notion of a conservator as a caretaker of an otherwise inanimate work. (You convincingly undermined the schism between animacy and inanimacy by introducing the concept of intra(in)animacy.) Consider, for instance, a conservator fully immersed in the meditative act of retouching. The touching becomes retouching becomes touching becomes retouching, blurring the boundaries between the actant and the acted-upon. In such a scenario, the conservator and the conserved engage in a process of co-becoming.

In a similar vein to Karen Barad's concept of intra-activity,[37] conservation and its object co-constitute each other through recurring engagement. When co-

constitution occurs, the separation between conservation and its object—much like the separation between hand and tool or animate and inanimate—becomes insignificant. Conservation's tools in hand, or tool-using, is gesturing, and "gesture makes the hand as much as the hand makes the gesture."[38] Through a cross-temporal call and response, and returning to an earlier point in this conversation, the object of conservation as gesture surfaces as a result of our response-ability. Once again, conservation does not merely intervene in the work, but rather becomes coexistent and cohabitative with the work in time and space.

I would like to revisit your previous assertion regarding performance remaining differently.[39] If we move away from the notion of performance as "dictated by the habituation to the logic of archive," performance cannot disappear.[40] (My concept of the archive encompasses both the physical and the virtual aspect, that is the document, trace and residue *and* the memory, skill and technique.[41]) Performance remains in objects and in the body in various forms, such as storytelling, gestures, recitation, enactment and transmissions. However, in the context of conservation, is it sufficient to say that performance "remains"? Does the meaning of "remain" involve conservation, and if so, what interpretations of conservation do we derive from this statement? How does "remain" conserve the past and how does it need to be conserved itself?

Schneider: This is a great question. In the past I have challenged the twentieth-century tendency to equate performance with disappearance because I wanted to think about performance as a kind of remaining—a remaining based on reiteration. "Performance remains but remains differently," I wrote. What I meant, then, was that it remains differently than say, object-based arts. Our discussion seems to imply, however, that perhaps object arts remain differently as well. Perhaps both performance and object arts participate in the kinds of remaining that previously seemed to distinguish performance from object arts. When I wrote that performance remains but remains differently, I was then thinking of performance composed of biomaterial and thus on a different temporality than other materials such as stone, paint, ceramic, etc. It has fascinated me to question whether the live endures longer than paint and stone. When you consider the Paleolithic art at Lascaux, for example, and consider that it has to be protected from the continual threat of the live, then the reproductive force of biomatter appears less fragile than the tender palm to stone of a negative hand stencil. Human body after body after body visiting, breathing, touching erodes the very materiality that would otherwise seem to outlast the living. And yet the living recurs, day after day. Looked at through recurrence, flesh can be seen as a material with both a greater variability and a greater ability to endure *through* that variation than the stone that holds the paint around a 30,000-year-old gesture. But I am getting away from the point.

What kind of a "remain" is performance? It is a remain that jumps body to body, or material to material, to recur as itself in difference. It is an assemblage of human and human, or human and tool, or object and object in or across time. It has the potential tenacity of a ritual. It has the temerity of orature's

changing same, the audacity of being composed in reiterative againness. It is constitutively relational because it both instantiates and requests response-ability. You ask whether "remain" already means "conserve"? Well, perhaps, if conservation can be released from its Western ideological investments in Platonic ideas of sameness to embrace an approach to sameness that *is* difference then it becomes possible to say not only that performance remains, but that performance conserves. The question, it seems to me, is *what* performance conserves. Or, what is a difference that is the same? If I perform a hand wave as a gesture, and I then reperform it, am I conserving the gesture of the handwave precisely through the difference of each iteration? Yes! Why not? But I am conserving it by virtue not only of its iteration, but by its capacity to be reiterated.

Hölling: Could you elaborate further on the connection between the relationality of gesture and its capacity to be reiterated?

Schneider: It is interesting to note that reiteration requires a pause or a break or a cut between or among iterations. There is iteration—pause/cut/break in time or in space—reiteration. The break is the space(s) among calls and responses, an open space for the potential of reiteration or response in return. In the break—to borrow the title of Moten's book, cited at the beginning of our conversation—is the space for relation between or among any one and its variations, or any singularity and the field of its alternatives, or the field of its returns (to echo André Lepecki after Deleuze and Guattari). I have thought about gesture as always already off of a singular body or object and into a space or spaces among bodies—or off of a singular object and into the space or spaces of its encounter. An obvious example—a pointing finger, whether in stone or flesh, gestures elsewhere. But any object articulates a space beyond itself as well as the space it takes up with its materiality. Is that space not relational? The negative space defined by any object, human or nonhuman, is always already a space open for, and often scriptive of, relation. Gesture outlines or traverses or otherwise engages the negative space we might refer to as in the break of call and response. You asked about the link between the relationality of gesture and its capacity to be reiterated. I am saying that gesture's very composition in/as reiteration *is* its relationality. Gesture is always already relational, carrying a past and a future (simultaneously and laterally) in its very form as iteration. Obviously, there was no first, authentic hand wave that will be recuperable except as a second, or an *n*th, jumping bodies and moving in multiple directions. But that past, rolling through bodies, is constituted in the changing same and is necessarily reconstituted in and through relation, in and through the negative spaces that preserve the condition for encounter. Perhaps we can approach conserving performance as a matter of preserving the negatives spaces, as much as the gestic material, like the waving hand, itself. How do we preserve the gaps or space off or times when the theater is dark? Robert Joseph writes of the potlatch mask when it is in its trunk and not being danced as a vital and quite dangerous part of the life of the dance over time. Rather than a time when nothing happens, can we think about preserving the space off,

the gap, the dark time as precisely the condition for (re)iteration? The gap, the interval, of nonperformance may be more "live" than we are accustomed to acknowledging. I am speaking of preserving the conditions for cross-temporal live (re)encounter, the conditions for sameness as difference.

Hölling: How is repetition conservation?

Schneider: We can only conceive of repetition as conservation if we acknowledge, against the full force of Platonic ideality and white Western habit of thought, that difference is not destruction.[42] That difference (also) preserves. If as Plato and, much later, Deleuze concur, repetition is difference (and surely it is)—how can it conserve? Well, perhaps we need to make room for a worldview in which repetition is indeed difference but, contra Plato, does not cancel or somehow pollute sameness. Here is where "repetition" may not be the best word, as performance studies scholars have begun to compellingly suggest.[43] Another way to ask this is: How is mimesis (understood not as "mere" imitation, nor as repetition, but more as antiphonic becoming) a required ingredient for authenticity? This is a very hard nut to crack philosophically for European and settler-colonial thought, or the mindset of mastery Tiffany Lethabo King has recently termed "conquistador subjectivity," but it is arguably a basic "aesthetic of possibility" in Yoruban ritual traditions, diasporic Black expressive form and other expressive forms that acknowledge orature and ceremony as ways of history.[44] To see difference as supporting sameness absolutely requires that we ditch the binary that habitually and baselessly insists that you cannot be the same and different simultaneously, and embrace the ways in which the authentic and the not, yet (in)authentic become each other, or co-constitute each other's playing field and are, in a word, inseparable. But in short: Repetition is conservation because conservation itself is already ritual-oriented and composed in/as response-ability.

Of course, you are invited to disagree. Is it perhaps in disagreement and the repartee of dissensus (calling, here, on Jacques Rancière) that the political stakes in the problem of preservation and performances take shape?[45] How can we conserve politics by coming to agreement? We can't! If we come to agreement, we would no longer, Rancière reminds, be political. We would not be "conserving" the political when agreeing on the way to conserve it in its outcomes. But we can preserve the conditions for the political. Perhaps something of the same holds true for the heart of difference that is performance. So, indeed, what do you think about that?

A French translation of this chapter is forthcoming in "Les archives en performance, la performance en archive: Action, Méthode, Recherche," edited by Anolga Rodionoff and Ross Louis. Éditions Hermann, Paris.

Notes

1 Rebecca Schneider and Diana Taylor, "What is Performance Studies?" Hemispheric Institute 2007, https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl/hidvl-int-wips/item/1344-wips-rschneider.html.

2 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

3 For a treatment of debates around that question see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

4 Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body" (1935), in *Techniques, Technology, and Civilization*, ed. Nathan Schlanger (New York: Durkheim Press, 2006), 77–96, esp. 81. See also Rebecca Schneider, "That the Past May Yet Have Another Future: Gesture in the Times of Hands Up," *Theatre Journal* 70, no. 3 (Spring 2018): 285–306.

5 See the work of Sylvia Wynter in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). On "flesh" in distinction to the body as sovereign, and bearing on both materiality and history (in the afterlives of slavery's capitalism), see Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81. See an explication of Black Feminist thought that bears on my orientation here in Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). On the word "Plantationocene" to replace Anthropocene, see Greg Mittman, "Reflections on the Planationocene: A Conversation with Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing," *Edge Effects Magazine*, June 18, 2019, https://edgeeffects.net/haraway-tsing-plantationocene.

6 Rebecca Schneider, "Slough Media," in *Remain*, ed. Iona B. Jucan, Jussi Parikka, and Rebecca Schneider (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 68.

7 I pursued the topic of conservation as epistemic practice during my research project Conservation and Contingency: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice at Max Planck institute for the History of Knowledge in Berlin in 2015. See Hanna B. Hölling, "The Technique of Conservation: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice," in "The Future of Conservation," Special issue, *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 2 (2017): 87–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/19455224.2017.1322114.

8 The idea of unfolding objects was discussed by Pip Laurenson in her lecture "Can Artworks Live in a Museum Collection?," Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, September 29, 2016, https://vimeo.com/184868009. Laurenson refers to Knorr Cetina's notions of relational and creative practice and her concept of epistemic objects (things that we engage with during our knowledge-producing activities) and explores the possibility of conceptualizing unfinished, incomplete objects—in other words, unfolding works—as epistemic objects of both conservation and artistic practice.

9 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E. C. Breasley (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853).

10 On call and response see Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, "Introduction," in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. DeFrantz and Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). On objects as colleagues, see Kim Tallbear, "Standing with and Speaking as Faith: A Feminist Indigenous Approach to Inquiry," *Journal of Research Practice* 10, no. 2 (2014). On "inter(in)animation," see Rebecca Schneider, "Intrainanimation," in *Animism in Art and Performance*, ed. Christopher Braddock (New York: Springer, 2017), 253–175.

11 Spatio-temporal continuity is often claimed when objects follow an unbroken spatio-temporal path. I assume in this discussion that tracing such a continuous path permits some change of parts and thus partial intervals of discontinuity as long as the form of objects is preserved.

12 Cassana Adams, "Japan's Ise Shrine and Its Thirteen-Hundred-Year-Old Reconstruction Tradition," *Journal of Architectural Education* 52, no. 1 (September 1998): 49–60.

13 Brian Castriota, "Variants of Concern: Authenticity, Conservation, and the Type-Token Distinction," *Studies in Conservation* 67, no. 1-2 (2022): 72–83; Brian Castriota, "Object Trouble: Constructing and Performing Artwork Identity in the Museum," *ArtMatters* Special Issue 1 (2021).

14 For related concerns, see Hanna B. Hölling, "Unpacking the Score: Notes on the Material Legacy of Intermediality," *On Curating: Fluxus Special Issue* 51 (2021), www.on-curating. org/issue-51-reader/unpacking-the-score-notes-on-the-material-legacy-of-intermediality. html.

15 For the notion of expressive authenticity as differing form nominal authenticity, see Jerold Levinson, see Denis Dutton, "Authenticity in Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerold Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Hanna B. Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive: Time, Change and Materiality in Media Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 49.

16 The word "episteme" stems from the old Greek "epistamai," meaning to be acquainted with, to understand. The contemporary use of the word—and my meaning—is to signify a principled system of understanding.

17 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London, New York: Verso, 2019).

18 "Genre of the human" is Sylvia Wynter's phrase. Human(ist) Man, and especially the modern variety of homo oeconomicus, is a genre of human whose imperial modality is essentially anti-Black. It is in the context of anti-Blackness that Fred Moten addressed the resistance of the object, cited at the opening of this conversation—one that he later engages as "(non)performance." Preserving performance may be, as I begin to suggest later in this conversation though not in these terms, preserving the conditions for (non)performance. See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Over-representation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3, (Fall 2003): 257–337. See Fred Moten, "Some Propositions on Blackness, Phenomenology, and (Non)Performance," in *Points of Convergence: Alternative Views on Performance*, ed. Marta Dziewańska and André Lepecki (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2017), 101–107. See also "The Erotics of Fugitivity" in Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 241–267.

19 On "response-ability" see D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10–12.

20 On this topic, see Sarah Molina, "Sustaining the Lives of Art Objects," *AMA Journal of Ethics* 21, no. 5 (May 2019), doi: 10.1001/amajethics.2019.450.

21 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

22 Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

23 Hanna B. Hölling, "Time and Conservation," in *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints, Copenhagen, 4–8 September 2017*, ed. J. Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2017).

24 Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: Elibron Classics, 2005 [1889]). See also Gilles Deleuze, Bergsonism, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1966]).

25 For a temporal critique of conservation, see Hölling, "Time and Conservation."

26 In his phenomenology of temporality, Husserl's rejects an understanding of the experience of the world as a series of unconnected instances. Protention (an anticipation of the next moment), though distinct from immediate experience, is retained in consciousness; it relates to the perception of the moment that has yet to be perceived. Continuity rests on the idea that each moment of protention becomes a retention (a perceptual act retained in consciousness) of the next. For the temporal experience in Husserl's phenomenology, see Christoph Hoerl, "Husserl, the Absolute Flow, and Temporal Experience," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 86, no. 2 (March 2013): 376–411.

27 See Carrie Noland's reading of Leroi-Gourhan in *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures, Producing Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 93–129.

28 Robin Bernstein, "Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race," *Social Text* 27, no. 4 (2009): 67–94.

29 See Nathaniel Mackey, "The Changing Same: Black Music in the Poetry of Amiri Baraka," *Boundary* 2, 6, no. 2 (1978): 355–386.

30 Robert Joseph, "Behind the Mask," in *Down from the Shimmering Sky: Masks of the Northwest Coast*, ed. Peter MacNair, Robert Joseph, and Bruce Grenville, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 20.

31 David Lowenthal, "Conservation Past and Present," Sylvester Baxter Lecture, Harvard University, Graduate School of Design, November 17, 2014.

32 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

33 My point is that a Western-trained art conservator is trained to believe that wood behaves in X manner and performs with the wood according to investments in those behaviors. Sets of rules take place and these can be considered rituals. An Indigenous ritual specialist may also be trained to know how wood behaves and also to know how wood in the form of a powerful mask behaves and that specialist treats the powerful masks accordingly. The power of art objects often is ritualized/choreographed, with attention to the power of outcomes. Materials are treated, in both cases, according to investments in sets of beliefs rooted in cultural norms, mores, economies and purposes.

34 Schneider, "Slough Media," 49–107.

35 Schneider, "Slough Media," 76.

36 Although a distinction needs to be made between the incorporations of a tool (a successful prosthesis) and body extensions (the tool-use) and their relation to the notion of body ownership. Whereas the former reorganizes the body, the latter does not affect the sense of body-ownership. See Helena De Preester and Manos Tsakiris, "Body-extension Versus Body-incorporation: Is There a Need for a Body-model?" *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 8, no. 3 (2007): 307–319.

37 Unlike the metaphysics of individualism that assumes the existence of individual entities or agential bodies that pre-exist their effect upon each other, Karen Barad puts forward the notion of "intra-action" that queers the familiar sense of causality. In Barad's ethico-onto-epistemology (or agential realist ontology), individuals do not pre-exist but rather materialize in intra-action. Barad suggests that "intra-action goes to the question of the making of differences, of 'individuals,' rather than assuming their independent or prior existence… 'individuals' only exist within phenomena (particular materialized/materializing relations) in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring." Karen Barad, "Intra-actions," an interview with Karen Barad by Adam Kleinman, *Mousse* 34 (2012), 79.

38 Schneider, "Slough Media," 77.

39 Schneider, *Performing Remains*.

40 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 97–98.

41 Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive*, 156–7.

42 See Rebecca Schneider, "Solo Solo Solo," in *Art After Criticism: New Responses to Contemporary Art and Performance*, ed. Gavin Butt (New York: Blackwell, 2004), 23–47.

43 See Soyica Diggs Colbert, Douglas A. Jones, Jr. and Shane Vogel, eds., *Race and Performance After Repetition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

44 See Tiffany Lethabo King, "New World Grammars: The 'Unthought' Black Discourses of Conquest," in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, ed. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 77–93. On "aesthetics of possibility" see Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham, 2016). On continuance as resurgence in Indigenous modes of preservation, see also Leanne

Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
45 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

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3   Vitality and the conservation of performance

Hélia Marçal

Introduction

The difference between the *live* performance and its documentation is far from being akin to that between life and death. And yet, analogies between the lives (and afterlives) of performance artworks and the *pathos* of human life populate relevant literature on performance art, its documentation, museumification—or, perhaps, *mummification*, if we pay some attention to recent criticisms[1]—and conservation. From the art historian and theorist Hal Foster, who calls performances acquired and displayed in the museum *zombie* artworks,[2] to several conservation projects aiming to bring performance artworks to life (of which I have participated in a few),[3] it is warranted to say that this analogy has gained its own life. There is a reason for that: this analogy has proven itself useful in Western literature on performance art and its many instantiations. The analogy pushes for the recognition of performance artworks by what they *do*, therefore asserting their materiality in the museum as both displayable and collectable cultural and artistic manifestations. This was particularly useful for conservation, where various analogies between the profession and medicine have been used in the field since at least the 1990s, and seeing performances as breaths of life we ought to maintain and promote changed the focus from objects to action. This analogy also brought a new wealth of vocabulary that allowed for the visualization of the expectations for performance artworks entering collections, from being alive,[4] to becoming zombies, having afterlives,[5] or becoming remains,[6] relics,[7] remainders,[8] or traces,[9] to name a few formulations. In this chapter, however, I argue that we need to move beyond discourses around life and death and towards an understanding of the collective and vital materiality of performance art within the politics of the commons. By politics of the commons, I mean an effort to bring humans and nonhumans together in sharing knowledge and resources in an anti-capitalist promotion of solidarity and relationality.[10] In this sense, I will be exploring the limits of the *live* in performance art and its conservation in relation to the place the performance artworks occupy in the ecologies of its care.

Suppose knowledges are as situated as bodies, as proposed by feminist scholar Donna Haraway in 1988.[11] In that case, mine is brought here by *intra-actions*, as

the feminist scholar Karen Barad puts it,[12] of my research in museums and academia, as both someone engaged in and committed to the practice of research as a *project* of resistance to late capitalism and the research of practice as the *site* of that resistance. I come from various "zones of presence," as the philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls them,[13] namely, conservation, performance studies and new materialisms. These fields have many points of contact and gaps, tension and conflicts, which, of course, bring up ambiguities and challenges that sometimes prove hard to untangle. In exploring some modes, possibilities and limitations of liveness in performance—and, in this sense, of preserving such condition—I will be thinking with new materialisms,[14] in general, and vital materialism and vitality,[15] in particular. More than exploring this topic through this lens, I will argue that vitality—at least the one at the root of vital materialisms—more than being a project that operates in the materiality of the performance "object," is a project that operates in the political, and, precisely, within the politics of difference within the commons.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will focus on the challenge of liveness and its configuration in the conservation of performance art. The second section will address how liveness is configured in memory institutions such as museums,[16] while also exploring the ways in which liveness is understood in conservation and the gaps that emerge in centring liveness as a conservation aim. The third section will introduce vitalism as an alternative to the idea of liveness. The fourth section will think with vitalist materialism to reconfigure *liveness* and what is conserved—that is, performance art—and conservation as practice, and even as a political project of difference and visibility within the ecologies of commons that co-constitute practices of conservation.

The issue of *liveness*

Debates around the *liveness* of performance art were at the forefront of the discussion on performance art and documentation at the end of the twentieth century.[17] Positions from the performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan's provocation that performance art becomes itself through its disappearance,[18] to performance studies scholar Philip Auslander's perspective on the inseparability of the live and the mediatized,[19] to the interplay between the text and the body, or the archive and the repertoire, as performance studies scholar Diana Taylor puts it,[20] framed the large body of literature that emerged within the field of performance studies and associated disciplines between the end of the century and the turn of the millennium.[21]

With few exceptions, discussions around performance and its documentation mainly focused on politics of representation: if and in which circumstances performance could be represented. Phelan's extensively repeated claim that performance "cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations" is typically juxtaposed with perspectives that have a more conciliatory relationship with documentation and mediatization.[22] Those include ones developed by Auslander,[23] who

sees performance and its documentation inhabiting contiguous spaces, or what Deleuze would call "zones of indiscernibility"[24] or the perspective of the art historian Amelia Jones, who calls our attention to the fragmentary nature of both documentation and the performance even itself, as distinct and, yet, unprivileged knowledge-making practices, tools and sources.[25] These perspectives have both a philosophical and historical drag, which explains each author's approach to issues of disappearance or recursiveness within the overarching discussion on performance and its representation.[26] In this chapter, however, I hope to join the scholars and practitioners who move the debate beyond representation,[27] and accept that the materiality of performance exists in a continuum, made of various, concurrent and, sometimes, contradicting material manifestations. This is even more relevant given the multiple modes of live that now exist and the ones that keep emerging in our hyper-mediatized society.[28] As suggested by Jones,[29] if the event is confirmed by the viewer (or witness) in the moment of its actual (or simulated) performance, what separates the memory of witnessing the *live* event from the embodied experience of learning it through documentation, or that of activating the event through re-enactment practices? If a performance, or any artwork for that matter, is always materialized partially and "recursively disseminated" over time,[30] and witnessed through mediation devices, either physical or not, what indeed separates the event from the different ways in which it manifests?

The main discrepancy between *live* event and representational forms of such an event is in the possibility of enacting substantial differences between instantiations. While the encounter between a human and a photograph always produces material change,[31] differences formed at the meeting point between audiences and performance documentation is less clear than the one produced in processes of activation also known as re-enactments.[32] Re-enactments, to use the words of performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider, allow us to engage in the process of re*turn*, not necessarily to go back to how things were, but to take another turn. In this reflection, Schneider discusses, too, how re-enactments engage with the idea of *liveness*, calling them "acts of survival":

> Entering, or re-enacting, an event or a set of acts (acts of art or acts of war) from a critical direction, a different temporal angle, may be (…) an act of survival, of keeping alive as passing on (in multiple senses of the phrase "to pass"). *This keeping alive is not a liveness considered always in advance of death nor in some way after death*, as Abramović might prefer in wanting to monumentalize her work to commemorate her as dead in advance, sealing her, in this way, into the archive. *Rather, it is more a constant (re) turn of, to, from, and between states in animation – an inter-(in)animation* (to quote Moten, to quote Donne again). For "survival" (…) may be a critical mode of remaining, as well as a mode of remaining critical: passing on, staying alive, in order to pass on the past as past, not, indeed, as (only) present. Never (only) present.[33]

This approach to liveness is echoed by performance studies André Lepecki and gender and performance theorist Louis van den Hengel, who recognize in these "acts of survival" the agency for rehearsing the potential history of performance artworks.[34] Calling them "chronopolitical operations," Lepecki suggests that re-enactments materialize not only the traces of what was but also the possibilities of what could have been.[35] The potential to create and sustain significant material change in artworks and their potential futures might justify the use of re-enactment to maintain or create liveness within museums. The next section will discuss the context of liveness in the museum and how it has been materially configured in the last fifteen to twenty years.

Living in the Museum?

The first performance artwork to enter a museum collection as a live action was *Good Feelings, Good Times* (2003) by the Slovakian artist Roman Ondák (b. 1966), which was acquired by Tate London in 2005. Since then, the pace of live acquisitions has accelerated, with more than fifty artworks now being part of collections all over the world, according to a list compiled by the web platform Monoskop.[36] Collecting and incorporating performance artworks into art museums is no mean feat. At least for public collections, such as the Tate, collecting a work means to hold it and conserve it in perpetuity. At least three trends can be observed in relation to the growing appetite for live action from the turn of the millennium until now: the nostalgia towards artistic practices created in the 1960s that emerged in the 1990s, the advent of the "experience economy," and the growth in number of delegated performances.[37]

Museums and collections began to show an interest in performance during the mid-1990s. Around this same time, and even with different terminology from what we see today, there was a clear growth in discussions and narratives in relevant literature around how and when to conserve performance. The art historian Jessica Chalmers posits that this turn to performance came through a form of nostalgia, and specifically, a process of longing for and reappraisal of the performances created in the 1960s.[38] This act of return, to borrow the expression by Schneider,[39] led to a further "process of historicization" of those works. The historicization of these works came with its fair share of challenges and possibilities: if, on the one hand, it led to the canonization of these works into what is called Art History, on the other hand, it also proposed that their original stance against commodification was characteristically part of performance art as a genre. Still, as the relationship between institutions and performance art was consolidated, so was the historical and "generational" legacy of these works.[40] Museums started to commission various re-enactments of past performances,[41] which, in some ways, either kick-started or condoned the acquisition of performance artworks. The growing trend that led museums to acquire these works led to recent structural changes both in museums and how they are organized,[42] and in philosophical considerations about the object of performance and its ontologies.[43] These moves towards an increased

presence of performance artworks in museums are linked to what has been called the experience economy.

The term *experience economy* was coined by two economists, B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, to recognize experiences and events as commodities. Within this framework, experiences delivered over a certain duration and to a specific audience in a time- and space-bounded context are part of what is exchanged between people and/or institutions.[44] From the description alone, one can see a lot of resemblance between these commodities as defined by Pine and Gilmore and performance artworks that now populate museum spaces and collections. Indeed, the importance of the experience economy in how museums are and have been rehearsing the collecting and curatorial goals of the institution is unmistakable.[45] The specific ways in which the experience economy tailors what we see in the museum are also impacted by forms of artistic practice that facilitate such experiences and one of them is the rise of delegated performances in museum collections.[46] As will become clear in the next paragraphs, this has also impacted our care strategies, specifically in the case of conservation practice.

Until recently,[47] performance artworks collected by museum collections as live actions were what Claire Bishop has called "delegated performances," meaning that they were created to be interpreted by people other than the artist. This trend, as Bishop explains, became prominent in the 1990s, with artists hiring non-professionals (or professionals from other fields) to "undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time and a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following his or her instructions."[48] This is the case, for example, with Roman Ondák's *Measuring the Universe* (2007), where a museum staff member measures the heights of visitors against a gallery wall, mapping out the cloud of sizes and their variations for a specific context and within a particular time. This action can be undertaken without the artist's presence without jeopardizing what is usually called the "authenticity" of the artwork as it is commonly recognized.[49] That, of course, does not mean that such works are easy to conserve, to collect, or to interpret—it would be quite a stretch to say that about the choreographic works of Simone Forti or the works of Tino Sehgal, the latter of which, by the artist's own specification, cannot be directly documented and rely on oral communication. This implies, however, that they are not dependent on a specific person to be or become *live*. Some of those artworks can also be exhibited as documentation, with documentation acting as a proxy of the *live* performance, which is collected with various display modes. Their display is not only independent from specific people, but it can also go ahead without the proposition of being *live* as in activated as a live performance. As the large majority of works collected by art collections were framed around these characteristics, so were their conservation needs. This, however, does not mean that conservation does not change the artwork as it enters a museum collection, but that conservation strategies are particularly tailored to the challenges prompted by collecting delegated performances.

The question of how and what to conserve when we are talking about performance art is as contemporary as practices of collecting.[50] The premise of

liveness brought opportunities to the conservation of delegated performances, particularly when the aim of keeping them *live* could be achieved by producing those performances in-house. The understanding of liveness as a conservation goal allowed for mapping the gaps in current processes.[51] The work of developing strategies tailored to the exceptional needs of performance art was, however, built on years of expertise developed in conservation of time-based media art.[52] Moreover, the expansion of practice was facilitated by theoretical discussions promoted in various conservation contexts, from the care of objects from Indigenous Cultures to the conservation of contemporary art.[53]

In collecting those works, the collecting institutions often also own the means for their production, from props to instructions or other forms of knowledge and information.[54] However, the challenges to liveness come with artworks that, in themselves, propose complex forms of life of the artwork beyond the artist or the museum. Some delegated performances still rely on the artist to be activated, with others changing profusely in each activation, reframing, at each encounter, the expectations of what the artwork was and could be,[55] and a small set of them also being specifically attached to means that cannot be reproduced or instantiated within the museum. Non-delegated performance artworks, in turn, intrinsically depend on the presence of the artist or a specific person. In those cases, the means of production are not necessarily owned by the artist, a gallery, or a collection, but are, instead, diffracted,[56] distributed.[57] One could argue that all forms of artistic practice exhibit such a complex net of human and nonhuman relations. However, as frequently happens with contemporary art, some artworks demonstrate such a relational nature in ways that are hard to ignore. That is the case, for example, of *Destierro* (Displacement), an artwork created by the Cuban-born artist Tania Bruguera (b. 1968) in 1998.

Destierro refers to a religious tradition from the Kongo peoples of the modern Democratic Republic of the Congo, called Nkisi Nkonde.[58] The Nkisi Nkonde is a wooden figure constructed, or, in the words used by Tania Bruguera, "loaded or activated" with mnemonic devices, whether traces, relics, or body parts of a deceased individual, and metal nails that represent wishes that have been asked and granted or, again using Bruguera's words, "complied with."[59] The Nkisi Nkondi tradition is built on the idea of reciprocity: indeed, if someone is to ask something from Nkisi Nkondi, they must promise something in return. If a wish is granted but the promise is not kept, the spirit of the Nkisi Nkonde retaliates. This work by Bruguera brings together the religious nature of this tradition— which, according to the artist, is understood by the audiences in Cuba—and the idea of reciprocity between the people and power structures. The artist used the concept around the creation of Nkisi Nkondi objects to produce a wearable Nkisi Nkonde. She walked dressed as a Nkisi Nkonde during a performance that took place in Havana in 1998, on Fidel Castro's birthday, echoing the promises that were made and not kept, asking for restitution, accountability, and justice. This work changes every time it is performed, having incorporated pencils in 2003 and bullets in 2005, and bringing new meanings in each interaction. As mentioned by gender and performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz, for

those who believe in the revolution's infallible glory, Castro almost functions as a Nkisi Nkonde, a symbolic figure in which the populace invests its hopes and desires. For those who denounce the leader, he is the fetish, the juju, the ultimate Other, also potentially represented in the performance. Again, Bruguera's performance explicates the ways in which the Cuban people, arguably inside and out of the island, participate in an economy of projection, investing desire and guilt in outside objects rather than understanding the potential transformation available through a politics of introjection.[60]

By introjection, Esteban Muñoz is here referring to the act of hammering a nail and, figuratively, to the process of implanting desire into the object itself—both as a holder of wishes and promises and as a reckoning. This stance demonstrates some of the ways in which the means of production for artworks like *Destierro* cannot be owned by collecting institutions. The permeation of desire into the people that are part of the performance and of that specific situated practice, on the one hand, distributes the affective ownership of the artwork while, on the other hand, diffracting the possibilities for enacting change with *Destierro*. Another aspect that is brought by this work is its association with the political context in which it emerges. This work could be considered politically charged, also called activist, or, to use Bruguera's term, *political-timing specific*. Bruguera uses this term to denote the interstitial space between art and political resistance, which, according to the artist, can only occur at the very specific time between a political or social crisis and its resolution by mainstream power structures.[61]

For Bruguera, with creating (and collecting) these forms of artistic practice comes the responsibility to generate difference under the auspices of the particular political moment from which the artwork originated. In her words, form and content "are interdependent, linked to the specificity of a political moment. Any political change requires a re-evaluation of the form used to produce political art."[62] This also poses an obstacle to a collecting and conservation framework centered on liveness: it is not that the museum itself cannot create difference—as, indeed, happens frequently with forms of performance art that are continually iterated—but the parameters of difference, or how much difference is allowed while retaining the artwork's identity, will hardly be the same for the museum and the manifold of stakeholders that are part of actions of political-timing specific performance artworks such as *Destierro*. [63] The generative potential of artworks such as *Destierro* is as complex as are its affects. The possibilities for creating difference are, therefore, as expansive as the boundaries that constrain it. This is an artwork that demands that we look at conservation in terms of social responsibility and *response-ability* to understand how conservation can contribute to safeguarding the artwork while enacting social change through and with the artwork.[64]

Again, going back to the issue of *liveness* in performance, the goal of conservation at least for performance artworks needs to go beyond understanding

what is needed for the artworks to remain *live*—or activated as performances in gallery spaces—or to find alternative ways for them to exist and act in museums, galleries and the other public spaces, and to reconfigure its actions to promote and realize their potential as vital matter. In light of issues such as climate change, the rising recognition of social inequalities, which are pervasive and systemic, institutions' (slow) reckoning with their colonial past and present, and the continued burgeoning of neoliberalism in the arts and humanities, conservation's apparent political neutrality, which, in fact, many conservators already recognize as being inexistent and impossible,[65] needs to be seriously rethought. A politically-committed conservation framework—i.e. one that focuses on resource and knowledge sharing—focused on generative vitality instead of sustaining life, as I will argue, could allow us to reconsider both conservation and performance artworks now and in the future.

Vitality

Vitality is a fundamental concept in feminist new materialisms. Within a materialist philosophical tradition, the term is used by philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze through Henry Bergson in *Bergsonism*,[66] Elizabeth Grosz,[67] Jane Bennett[68] and Rosi Braidotti.[69] It is also important to recognize the legacy of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza[70] and Indigenous knowledge in a discussion focused on nonhuman agency and relationality for the philosophical field of new materialisms.[71] Vitality or vitalism is a notion that recognizes the growing complexity of life and its potential for sustaining and creating difference.[72] In other words, vitalism distinguishes the intraconnectedness of beings in their visible and invisible complexity and understands what they could become and what they could have been. As the philosopher Scott Lash puts it, "the notion of life has always favoured an idea of *becoming* over one of *being*, of movement over stasis, of action over structure, of *flow* and *flux*."[73]

In "Vitalism Now – A Problematic," the philosopher Monica Greco traces back the history of the definitions of vitalism.[74] This concept was adopted by various philosophers and scholars working within the field of moral philosophy and metaphysics, being discredited early on due to its spiritual undertones.[75] One of the first pioneers of vitalism (at least in England) was Anne Conway in the seventeenth century, for whom the vitalist understanding of the life of things was one of the ways of recognizing the Christian God's agency in the making of the World.[76] The domain of the discussion on vitalism shifted to philosophy of medicine and biology, to bioethics and to ideas of humanness and human becoming in the twentieth century, through the reflections of authors such as Henri Bergson, Georges Canguilhem, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault or Antonio Negri, to name a few.[77]

Vitalism was reframed in the twenty-first century, not only in the life sciences, but also in the social and human sciences. One of the main reasons for this reframing of vitalism within the social and human sciences (and feminist epistemologies in particular) has to do with the object of analysis that was

proposed within vitalism. In her analysis of vitalism now, Greco proposes a shift from considering vitalism as an onto-epistemological problem to one concerning an *ethical* and *political* problem.[78] The framing of life as an ontological and epistemological (and not necessarily political or ethical) problem comes with its own set of criticisms. For one, vitalism as an approach typically conceives processes of becoming as being inseparable from all matter,[79] which is in opposition to understandings of becoming as a purely ontological measure within disciplines such as biology or medicine. If humans, animals, insects, microbiomes and plants engage in processes of becoming throughout their life, this life is also characterized by *pathos*, or the end of life and, by association, that process of becoming. As stated by Greco, who develops this analysis through the work of the bioethicist and philosopher of science Thomas Osborne,[80]

> A vitalism premised on the recognition of this pathic dimension would characterize life not simply as affirmatively "vital" but as permanently engaged in a relationship with the possibility of its negation – death, disease, sub-normativity, error.[81]

This premise of vitalism, however, as proposed by Greco, does not need to be constricted by disciplinary domains. Indeed, even when considering vitalism outside the biological domain, it is possible to extend its scope to the understanding of life as a vibrant, vital relationality that exists across organic and inorganic matter.[82] Indeed, in proposing vitality and life as a complex relational endeavor, and a diverse body of self-organizing matter—one that relates oxygen atoms with the pulsing breath of biological life, or, in turn, one that relates human behavior with nature, leading to changes in the percentage of the set of atoms in the atmosphere—it is possible to acknowledge the inherent intra-actions between ways of being and becoming in the world at any given moment.[83] Vitality, in this sense, resists binaries like life and death, and expands the idea of life beyond the human. Moreover, in centering relationality, vitalism proposes a range of life and becoming beyond the normativity defined by traditional conceptions of what is human—that of a Western, white, middle- to upper-class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, English-speaking, male human—and living—that of organic, biological, matter.[84] In other words, vitalism allows us to reflect that the life of some humans has been granted more value than the life of other humans, while also promoting a wider understanding of the state of living beyond common assumptions between what is animated and what is not. Some of such vitality can escape the most observant researcher or equipment, as the networks of complexity generate, in themselves, multi-dimensional activities that are hard to understand and harder to describe from a single perspective or situated practice.[85] To the agency and generative activity of non-living things—such as artworks—Jane Bennett calls "thing-power," as an acknowledgement "toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience."[86] In this

sense, vitalism clarifies how life and knowledge constitute each other,[87] and how humans and nonhumans coexist through their beings, possible becomings, and, therefore, alternative realities and narratives.

Vitalism brings up various questions and possibilities for artworks, museums, conservators and audiences, among the many agents that participate in the vital becoming of the World. First, in considering artworks—such as *Destierro – active matter*,[88] we need to assume that their vital becoming depends on (1) their own (albeit limited) agency, (2) the situatedness of knowledge-making activities and (3) their capacity of becoming different. I have elsewhere explored nonhuman agency of time-based media and performance artworks, the situatedness of knowledge in the conservation of performance art, and the possibilities of difference.[89] Here, however, I am concerned with the ethical impacts of the shift from an idea of liveness to one of vitality in the conservation of performance. How does conservation practice—one that looks at *liveness* in the context of display and within the economy of experience—participate in expanding or restricting the agency of artworks, and how does such involvement respond to the aims of conservation in the sphere of vitality? Looking at the other side, that of procedures and practices and man-made things with power, I ask how—in making that complexity and entanglement visible—one can start questioning the ways in which they are inherently co-constituted.

Towards difference in collective imagination

The previous sections have highlighted how current models of conservation of performance art in museums assume that the museum is to own the means of their production. We have seen how that model is optimistic, if not unsustainable. Vitalism refuses or, at least, diffracts the ownership of the means of production of performance artworks—from creation to the actual materialization of each manifestation. If the power of things as self-organizing matter, in itself, escapes institutional control, what to say about the agential network that defines and promotes difference in artworks and their potential futures? This last section will look at how vitalist materialism reconfigures the expectations around ownership and material stability of performance artworks.

At its core, as proposed by Greco,[90] vitalism is as much about an onto-epistemological discussion about the world as it is about a politico-ethical project that recognizes the intradependencies of knowledge and being. Indeed, vitalism makes visible the ecologies of the commons that constitute the world as we know it and, in its process, identifies inherent forms of difference and differing in those constitutions. Evidently, the ecologies of commons are changing as much as everything else, including those of performance artworks such as the ones I am discussing in this chapter. The artwork *Time*, by David Lamelas, had a very different set-up in 1970, when it was first instantiated, than the one that it has now, with its last iteration integrating a live video feed transmitted online.[91] The artwork *Destierro* had a very different ecology of practice when it was first instantiated on the streets of Havana in

comparison to now, when it has been written about and its props exhibited in many venues. We can see how *Destierro* mobilizes more members of society in ways that are not exactly uncommon when we think about symbolic interactions between people and artworks, but can be somewhat different from what we are accustomed to. The people that followed Bruguera in the 1998 performance in *Destierro* are people who engage with this moment in time, this elusive and yet tactile materiality, this practice that is so specific to a certain community and to a certain affectivity, in ways that are hard or even impossible to recreate in a museum environment. Could *Destierro* continue to grow and acquire these meanings and affects within a museum collection? How could conservation attend to the emotional needs of a live, performative and consequential metaphor?

A vitalist turn to collectivity asserts that two of the main convictions surrounding the conservation of performance might not always be right. First of all, conserving performances is more about recognizing and fostering intra-dependency instead of promoting their independence by trying to own the means of their production. And the calls for yielding control in collecting and conservation processes are not only an ethical imperative, but are, indeed, an inevitability as one cannot control what is not theirs. I am arguing here for a distributed ethics of conservation as one that serves a collective imagination and promotes the operation of performance through its difference and differing practices. In this sense, in the realization of conservation as a collective practice, the museum would work as a node of a network that is ever-expanding. This, ultimately, would have to lead to a revision of current ownership models, that are based on the museum owning the title of the work as well as its means of production—not only of artworks but of the knowledge needed to foster their vitality, and the one produced by their own vibrant matter.[92] And, in constructing care as a collective responsibility and vitality as an ethical imperative, it would be possible to start to reconfigure the institution as a co-owned, diffractive, rhizomatic space that it could be, effectively changing the optics of conservation to a politics of care *with* the artworks and their existence within the commons.

A politics of care *with* artworks and their ecologies of practice promotes not only a vitalist understanding of artworks as self-organizing matter, but also conservation as a care activity in, for, and of the world. Only in caring *with*, and not *for* or *about*,[93] artworks and their human and nonhuman ecosystem can we start mobilizing collectively (and intra-dependently) to effectively foster the change we want to see in our institutions. Caring with artworks and each (human and nonhuman) other could imply, among other things, building capacity to bring people from different backgrounds and lived experiences to develop novel models for decision-making, while also seriously engaging with openness and transparency in collecting, management and conservation processes; intentionally engaging in reciprocal exchanges that are not only meaningful for the museums, but that are also crucial to maintain the vital forces of the ecologies of practice that grow with the performances that are acquired by museums; accepting that uncertainty is inevitable, and that ambiguity is at the core of the (undefined) nature of many performance artworks; recognizing the conservation labor and its distributive

nature, what Nancy Fraser calls misrecognition and resource maldistribution;[94] promoting possibilities for difference, and making of the institution what Haraway calls "a shared feminist 'homespace,' where minds, bodies and feelings are welcome and embodied knowledge(s) can be progressed."[95] This last approach, I argue, is essential to at least try to develop a sustainable distribution of knowledge about the work.

As I have argued elsewhere,[96] these aspects combined engage in a process that the feminist and new materialist scholar Rosi Braidotti called "affirmative ethics." Affirmative ethics is a process that allows us to identify negative patterns through what Braidotti calls "radical relationality." This radical relationality is seen first by understanding those negative patterns as part of an amalgamation of processes, structures and agents, and affirming their relational nature through an intrinsic commitment to change. However, this change is rooted in accountability—or what one can be accountable for—changing the realm of possibility by promoting collaboration, compassion and radical acts of solidarity and recognition. As stated by Braidotti,

> affirmative ethics consists not in denying negativity, but in reworking it outside the dialectical oppositions; (…) it is not about the avoidance of pain, but rather a different way of reworking it; (…) [It] aspires to an adequate understanding of the conditions of our relational dependency on the negative, (…) in the active transformation of the negative in something else. Ethics is not just the application of moral protocols, norms and values, but rather the force that contributes to conditions of affirmative becoming.[97]

In general, affirmative ethics allows us to think about what could have been and to understand what we need to change to make it happen. It demands vulnerability and openness to a compassionate critique. To use Braidotti's words once again, vulnerability "as the power of exposure is defined as an ethical and political means to come to terms with—rather than disavow—the untenable, painful and unacceptable aspects and disasters of posthuman times."[98] This, of course, demands a vulnerability that can be hard to champion in institutions, but perhaps that is indeed the *pathos* that comes with accepting and fostering the ambivalence of the mission of conserving performance as a project of vitalist, affirmative, politically-committed and ethical care of performance artworks.

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Notes

1 Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London and New York: Verso, 2017). See also the project *Living Collections Catalogue*, produced by the Walker Art Center through the Getty Foundation's Online Scholarly Catalogue Initiative, which published its first volume in 2014. The vocabulary around life and living is present across the various chapters of Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman eds., *Histories of Performance Documentation: Museum, Artistic, and Scholarly Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

2 Foster, *Bad New Days*.

3 "Documentation and Conservation of Performance—Project," Tate, accessed March 31, 2021, www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/documentation-conservation-performa nce, and "Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum," Tate, accessed March 31, 2021, www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible.

4 "Conserving Tony Conrad," accessed October 2, 2021, www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/ tony-conrad-25422/conserving-tony-conrad.

5 Several authors, artists, curators, and conservators use this term. See, for example, the conference *The Manifold (after) lives of Performance*, held in November 2010 as a co-Production of de Appel arts centre in Amsterdam and STUK Kunstcentrum in Leuven, or the curatorial programme *Afterlives: The Persistence of Performance*, curated and convened by Adrian Heathfield and André Lepecki for the MoMA, in New York, in September 2015. See Hanna Hölling, "On the Afterlife of Performance–The Manifold Afterlife of Performance, November 13–15, 2009," Review of the conference *The Manifold (After) Lives of Performance*, (Part 1) (Amsterdam and Leuven: De Appel Arts Centre and STUK Kunstcentrum, 2009), Hanna Hölling, "On the Afterlife of Performance," Review of the conference *The Manifold (After) Lives of Performance*, November 12–13, 2010 (Part 2) (Amsterdam and Leuven: De Appel Arts Centre and STUK Kunstcentrum, 2011), or Anja Foerschner and Rachel Rivenc. "Documenting Carolee Schneemann's Performance Works," *Getty Research Journal* 10 (February 1, 2018): 167–89.

6 See, for example, Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, 2011).

7 Various texts in Teresa Calonje, ed., *Live Forever: Collecting Live Art* (London: Koenig Books, 2014).

8 Susanne Foellmer, "Series and Relics: On the Presence of Remainders in Performance's Museum," in *Art and Dance in Dialogue*, ed. Sarah Whatley, Imogen Racz, Katerina Paramana, and Marie-Louise Crawley (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 147–62.

9 See, for example, Foerschner and Rivenc, "Documenting."

10 For more on the commons see Rebecca Hollender, "A Politics of the Commons or Commoning the Political? Distinct Possibilities for Post-Capitalist Transformation," *Spectra* 5, no. 1 (April 14, 2016).

11 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies: FS* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575.

12 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–31, and Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). I developed the idea of intra-actions in conservation theory and practice during my PhD project (2013–2018). This notion has been deeply influential in my thinking since then. In the meantime I collaborated with Brian Castriota, thinking-with Barad's agential realism in relation to the fragment as it figures into conservation discourses; Castriota has since also extended ideas from agential realism to conservation practices, particularly around documentation. See Hélia Marçal, "Towards a Relational Ontology of Conservation," in *ICOM-CC 19th Triennial Conference Preprints, Beijing, 17–21 May 2021*, ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2021), 8; Brian Castriota and Hélia Marçal, "Always Already Fragment: Integrity, Deferral, and Possibility in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage," in *Das Fragment im digitalen Zeitalter. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen neuer Techniken in der Restaurierung*, ed. Ursula Schädler-Saub and Angela Weyer (Berlin: Hendrik Baßler Verlag, 2021), 63–78. See also Brian Castriota, "The Enfolding Object of Conservation: Artwork Identity, Authenticity, and Documentation," in *Conservation of Contemporary Art: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice*, ed. Renée van de Vall and Vivian van Saaze (Cham: Springer, forthcoming), pp. tbc, and Castriota and Walsh (Chapter 7) in this volume.

13 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

14 New materialisms is an interdisciplinary area of philosophical thought that looks at the interactions among humans and nonhumans. The scholars cited in this chapter (Haraway, Barad, Braidotti) are part of feminist new materialisms scholarship, developing theory around ethics, politics and metaphysics.

15 In this chapter, vitality and vitalism will be used interchangeably.

16 For "memory institutions," see Elizabeth Stainforth, "From Museum to Memory Institution: The Politics of European Culture Online," *Museum and Society* 14, no. 2 (June 2017): 323–37.

17 See, e.g., Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), and Beth Capper and Rebecca Schneider, "Performance and Reproduction: Introduction," *TDR/The Drama Review* 62, no. 1 (2018): 8–13.

18 See, for example, Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

19 Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

20 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

21 The field of Performance Studies was developed at the intersection of various disciplines, including (but not limited to, nor in any particular order) art history, linguistics, anthropology, and theater. The field has been concerned with issues of performance and performativity. In this case, it has been particularly focused on the performance of everyday life through what is called the "performative turn." Among other things, this performative turn analyzes behaviors, narratives, structures and infrastructures, objects and movements as performance. In 2003, Diana Taylor wrote that the field emerged in the 1970s as "a product of the social and disciplinary upheavals of the late 1960s that rocked academe," seeking to specifically "bridge the

disciplinary divide between anthropology and theater by looking at social dramas, liminality, and enactment as a way out of structuralist notions of normativity." See Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

22 Phelan, *Unmarked*, 146.
23 Philip Auslander, *Liveness*; and Philip Auslander, *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).
24 With "zones of discernibility," Deleuze is referring to areas of "an extreme proximity, an absolute contiguity." These areas of extreme proximity relay the inseparability of concepts, discourse, or matter at large. See Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; Or, the Formula," in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (London: Verso, 1998), 68–90, 78.
25 Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1, 1997): 11–18.
26 Peggy Phelan's proposals are well discussed in the fields of Performance, Cultural, and Literary Studies. Herbert Molderings, among other authors, has also analyzed this dichotomy. In a criticism of the sometimes sharp duality that we witness in Performance Studies discourses, Philip Auslander recognizes this same tendency in Theater Studies. Herbert Molderings, "Life Is No Performance: Performance by Jochen Gerz," in *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1986), 166–180; and Philip Auslander, "Against Ontology: Making Distinctions between the Live and the Mediatized," *Performance Research*, 2, no. 3 (1997): 50–55.
27 Scholars include André Lepecki, Rebecca Schneider, Diana Taylor and Louis van de Hengel, among others.
28 See, e.g., Catherine Wood, "Live," In Terms of Performance (2016), http://intermsofp erformance.site/keywords/live/catherine-wood; on hyper-mediatization see Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2016).
29 Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia."
30 Adrian Heathfield, "Then Again," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books and the University of Chicago Press, 2012), 27–35. On recursion, see also Christopher Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 77–88.
31 Barad, *Meeting the Universe*.
32 *Re-enactment* is a widely contested term, and its use can vary across disciplines and practices. Other terms—such as activations, instantiations, iteration, return, re-doing, re-performance, re-materialization—are also in use. Activations, for example, has been used by Tate to discuss the ways in which performances are displayed (or, indeed, activated in the gallery). Due to the very particular standing *re-enactment* has in feminist epistemological approaches to performance (and, especially, in new materialistic research), the term will be used in this chapter, except when another term is specifically used by a cited author. See Schneider, *Performing Remains*; André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016); Louis van den Hengel, "Archives of Affect: Performance, Reenactment, and the Becoming of Memory," in *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, ed. László Munteán, Liedeke Plate, and Anneke Smelik (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 125–142.
33 Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 7. Emphasis added in italics.
34 See van den Hengel, "Archives of Affect," and Lepecki, *Singularities*. In using the expression *potential history*, I am trying to foster resonances between these approaches and those of Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019). On the same topic, see Helia Marçal, "Becoming Difference: On the Ethics of Conserving the In-Between," *Studies in Conservation*, 67(1–2): 30–37.
35 Lepecki, *Singularities*, 21.
36 "Performance Art," accessed October 2, 2021, https://monoskop.org/Performance_a rt. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

37 Jessica Chalmers, "Marina Abramović and the Re-performance of Authenticity," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 22, no. 2 (2008): 23–40.
38 Chalmers, "Marina Abramović."
39 Schneider, *Performing Remains*.
40 See Chalmers, "Marina Abramović," 34. In the chronology written by the art historian Amelia Jones in 2012, it is possible to identify events that directly contributed towards the rhizomatic confluence of the relationship between performance art and the museum, namely (and among others): the staging of the first official Fluxus event (by George Maciunas), which was held at the AG Gallery (New York, 1961), the display of Robert Morris' re-enacted and then recorded works at the Guggenheim Museum in 1993 or the pioneering exhibition *Outside the Frame/Performance and the Object: A Survey History of Performance Art in the USA since the 1950s*, held at the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art in 1994. This last event was groundbreaking in the scope and breadth of the various documents and live performance events it activated. These, however, are just a selection of a much more expanded chronology. For more on this, see Amelia Jones, "Timeline of Ideas: Live Art in (Art) History, A Primarily European-US-based Trajectory of Debates and Exhibitions Relating to Performance Documentation and Re-enactments," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books and the University of Chicago Press, 2012), 425–434.
41 Jones, "Timeline of Ideas."
42 There are several examples of changes to the structure of museums. Tate, for example, has developed the expertise of staff in time-based media conservation teams. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) renamed its Department of Media as Department of Media and Performance Art. See Louise Lawson, Acatia Finbow, and Hélia Marçal, "Developing a Strategy for the Conservation of Performance-Based Artworks at Tate," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 42, no. 2 (May 2019): 114–34.
43 Cf. Calonje, *Live Forever*, and Pip Laurenson and Vivian van Saaze, "Collecting Performance-Based Art: New Challenges and Shifting Perspectives," in *Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters*, ed. Outi Remes, Laura MacCulloch, and Marika Leino (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), 27–41.
44 B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, "Welcome to the Experience Economy," *Harvard Business Review* 76, no. 4 (1998): 97–105.
45 See, e.g., Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004): 51–79; for a recent article with quotes from curators see Scott Reyburn, "Snap and Go: The Pros and Cons of the Art Experience Economy," *The Art Newspaper*, September 2, 2019. www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/12/02/snap-and-go-the-pros-and-cons-of-the-art-experience-economy.
46 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2012).
47 See Helia Marçal, "Ecologies of Memory in the Conservation of 'Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain,'" *Tate Research*, published as part of the research project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum, 2022. See also Helia Marçal, "A Word about Performance Art," in *Conservation of Time-Based Media*, ed. Deena Engel and Joanna Philips (London: Routledge, 2022).
48 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 91.
49 For an expanded understanding of authenticity see Vivian van Saaze, "Key Concepts and Developments in Conservation Theory and Practice," in *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 35–60; and Brian Castriota, "Object Trouble: Constructing and Performing Artwork Identity in the Museum," *ArtMatters: International Journal for Technical Art History*, Special Issue no. 1 (September 2021): 12–22.

50 On this topic, see John Rockwell, "REVERBERATIONS; Preserve Performance Art? Can You Preserve the Wind?" *New York Times*, April 30, 2004. www.nytimes.com/2004/04/30/movies/reverberations-preserve-performance-art-can-you-preserve-the-wind.html.

51 Lawson, Finbow, and Marçal, "Developing a Strategy."

52 Hélia Marçal, "Contemporary Art Conservation," *Tate Research*, published as part of the research project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum, 2019.

53 van Saaze, *Installation Art*; Lawson, Finbow, and Marçal, "Developing a Strategy;" Marçal, "Contemporary Art Conservation."

54 This is not to say that the cultural and economic capital leads to the *de facto* creation of certain forms of performance art and not others. One could argue that sometimes what is collected is no more than the cultural capital of collecting itself. See McKenzie Wark, "My Collectible Ass," *e-flux journal*, no. 85 (2017).

55 See, for example, the description of the activation of *Time* (1970) by David Lamelas in Louise Lawson and Hélia Marçal, "Unfolding Interactions in the Preservation of Performance Art at Tate," in *ICOM-CC 19th Triennial Conference Preprints, Beijing, 17–21 May 2021*, ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2021), 8.

56 Barad, *Meeting the Universe*.

57 Cf. Laurenson and van Saaze, "Collecting Performance-Based" and Marçal, "Ecologies of Memory."

58 The spelling used—Nkisi Nkonde—follows José Esteban Muñoz's in "Performing Greater Cuba: Tania Bruguera and the Burden of Guilt," in *The Sense of Brown*, ed. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong'o (Duke University Press, 2020), 86–99. Nkisi Nkondi is used for plural.

59 "Displacement – Tania Bruguera," accessed October 2, 2021, www.taniabruguera.com/cms/104-0-Displacement.htm.

60 See Esteban Muñoz, "Performing Greater Cuba," 97.

61 Tania Bruguera, "Notes on Political Timing Specificity," *Artforum* 57, no. 9 (2019): 205.

62 Bruguera, "Notes on Political."

63 It is not that museums have not collected artworks that are performative or activist for that matter. Indeed, we've seen artworks from artists such as Tania Bruguera herself being collected by museums worldwide. And the conservation field has been prompted by artworks such as *Tatlin's Whisper #5* (2008) and *Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version)* (2009) (also by Bruguera) to revisit procedures and theoretical models to see how the museum and other collecting institutions can keep those artworks while allowing them to thrive. That was, for example, one of the focuses of the projects Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the museum, and Documentation and Conservation of Performance, based at the Tate. For a discussion on the practices at the Guggenheim Museum, which currently owns *Tatlin's Whisper #6*, see Joanna Phillips and Lauren Hinkson, "New Practices of Collecting and Conserving Live Performance Art at the Guggenheim Museum," *VDR-Journal Beiträge zum Erhalt von Kunstund Kulturgut 1* (2018): 124–132.

64 The idea of response-ability rehearsed here comes directly from Barad's writing, namely Karen Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, Spacetime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-come," *Derrida Today* 3, no. 2 (2010): 240–268. See also Castriota and Walsh in this volume.

65 The notion of neutrality in conservation has been contested in several articles, including Hélia Marçal, "Conservation in an Era of Participation," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 97–104; Hélia Marçal, "Situated Knowledges and Materiality in the Conservation of Performance Art," *ArtMatters: International Journal for Technical Art History*, Special Issue no. 1 (September 2021): 55–62; Jane Henderson, "Beyond Lifetimes: Who Do We Exclude When We

Keep Things for the Future?," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 43, no. 3 (2020): 195–212.

66 Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

67 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2004).

68 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

69 Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013).

70 Benedictus de Spinoza and E. M. Curley, *Ethics* (London: Penguin Books, 1996); and Benedictus de Spinoza, Samuel Shirley, Steven Barbone, Lee Rice, and Jacob Adler, *The Letters* (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub. Co, 1995).

71 See, for example, Lauren Tynan, "What Is Relationality? Indigenous Knowledges, Practices and Responsibilities with Kin," *Cultural Geographies* 28, no. 4 (October 2021): 597–610.

72 Cf. Moira Gatens, "Feminism as 'Password': Re-Thinking the 'Possible' with Spinoza and Deleuze," *Hypatia* 15, no. 2 (2000): 59–75.

73 Scott Lash, "Life (Vitalism)," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2–3 (2006): 323–29, 323, emphasis in the original.

74 Monica Greco, "Vitalism Now – A Problematic," *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, no. 2 (2021): 47–69.

75 Greco, "Vitalism Now."

76 Laura Alexander, "Anne Conway's Vitalism: A Physico-Theological Philosophy," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 32, no. 2 (2019): 93–96.

77 Greco, "Vitalism Now," and Lash "Life."

78 Greco, "Vitalism Now."

79 Also called *mattering*, in a Baradian terminology. Barad, *Meeting the Universe*.

80 Thomas Osborne, "Vitalism as pathos," *Biosemiotics* 9, no. 2 (2016): 185–205.

81 Greco, "Vitalism Now," 50.

82 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

83 Barad, *Meeting the Universe*. See also Hélia Marçal, "Towards a Relational." In making this point, Greco compares Newtonian physics with theories of complexity, drawing specifically on Prigogine and Stengers, and also with writings by Alfred Whitehead. Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (London, England: Flamingo, 1985); Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: The Tarner Lectures Delivered in Trinity College November 1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

84 Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

85 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

86 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xvi.

87 Barad, *Meeting the Universe*.

88 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

89 Marçal, "Towards a Relational," "Situated Knowledges" and "Becoming Difference," respectively.

90 Greco, "Vitalism Now."

91 Lawson and Marçal, "Unfolding Interactions."

92 See also Castriota and Walsh in this volume (Chapter 7).

93 The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London: Verso Books, 2020).

94 Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56.

95 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges."

96 I have explored this approach as part of my participation in the project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum. See Marçal, "Contemporary Art Conservation," and "Ecologies of Memory." Furthermore, I have also explored the

topic of affirmative ethics in Farideh Fekrsanati and Hélia Marçal, "Affirming Change in Participatory Practice of Cultural Conservation," in *Participatory Practices in Art and Cultural Heritage – Learning Through and from Collaboration*, ed. Christoph Rausch, Ruth Benschop Emilie Sitzia, and Vivian van Saaze (Springer Nature: Cham, Switzerland, 2022), 127–141, and Hélia Marçal and Rebecca Gordon, "Affirming Future (s): Towards a Posthumanist Conservation in Practice," in *Posthumanism in Practice*, ed. Christine Daigle and Matthew Hayley (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2023), 165-178.

97 Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 167.

98 Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, 169.

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4 Conserving the un-conservable

Documenting environmental performance for the twenty-first century

Gabriella Giannachi

Practices of collecting, archiving, documenting and reinterpreting performance constitute a valid and even indispensable form of conservation which can be used in the context of a wide range of performative artforms. However, while the theory of documentation is becoming increasingly suitable for dealing with the complexity of performative works, the practice remains challenging, both inside but also, especially, outside of the museum context. This has largely to do with a lack of resources but also with the difficulty of documenting, and so conserving, the "liveness" of performance. This chapter looks specifically at environmental performance by which I mean works which involve performative and environmental processes that often evade current practices of documentation, either because of the complexity of documenting life itself, or because they directly involve participants, whose point of view is often under-documented, or because they entail processes of environmental change that are usually considered to be un-documentable (and so un-conservable), or even simply because the works do not form part of a museum collection and so documentation has not been a priority. By looking into the intersection of theories of documentation and three key terms in environmental theory, namely environment, nature and climate, I identify a framework based on what I call the "environment of the work" that may help to understand how best to deal with these complex works and could constitute a useful boundary object to build a new understanding not only of the documentation of environmental works but also of what constitutes performance more widely. Essential to this is an understanding of the environment of performance being located in both nature and culture, which means that there is a dimension of the work that tends to escape documentation, as well as conservation, and that has to do with life itself. An environmental work may thus both consist of an environment (in nature) and have an environment (in culture). In this context, the position and role of the audience (or other participants), the context of the work and the care for the evolution of the work over time, including its decay, form key elements of the framework that need to be documented to ensure that the work can continue to be curated over time.

Documenting performance—the role of the audience

Performance documentation originated with the emergence of performance, which established itself, as art historian RoseLee Goldberg suggested in *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (1979),[1] at the time of the publication of the Futurist manifesto in 1909. Performance, which had also been popular among Constructivist, Dada, Surrealist and Bauhaus artists, then resurfaced in the 1920s and 1930s, and then again in the 1960s, becoming one of the most prominent art forms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The association of performance with a live event, and so the presence of a performer and audience, led scholars to question the validity of documentation as a strategy to preserve performance for subsequent generations. But as can be seen from Oskar Schlemmer's notes and sketches for *das Triadische Ballett* (*The Triadic Ballet*, 1921–29), and the document accompanying them published in 1938 approximately, and now in MoMA's collection, which accurately describes the conditions for the performance of the work, documentation is not only a valid resource to study past presentations of artworks, but also plays a key role in their conservation.

There have been numerous debates in the fields of performance studies and art history as to the "nature" of the relationship between performance and documentation. While performance studies theorist Peggy Phelan suggested that performance "cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representation,"[2] performance studies theorist Philip Auslander, in discussing Yves Klein's use of photomontage in *Leap into the Void* (1960), noted that performance does not always originate in a live act and could find its point of origin in documentation. By stating that documentation "does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance" but rather tends to produce "an event as performance,"[3] Auslander acknowledged that documentation forms part of the way performance is produced. In other words, documentation is not only what remains, or what can be used for conservation, but also one of the mechanisms through which performance occurs.

Shifting the debate, art historian Amelia Jones noted that we tend to encounter past performance works purely through their documentation (1997),[4] and curator and art historian Barbara Clausen pointed out that performance should not be considered solely as the "authentic experience" of a live or present moment but rather as an "ongoing process of an independent relationship between event, medialization, and reception."[5] Whereas in performance studies the debate focused on the ontology of performance, in art history more attention was given to its reproducibility. Since then, debates have continued to consider the reproducibility of performance and the role played by the audience. Thus, in his most recent study, *Reactivations* (2018), Auslander, elaborating on Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), notes that Benjamin used the term reactivation in relation to technical reproduction.[6] Thus Benjamin states: "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object

from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced."[7] For Auslander, the use of the term reactivation means one could envisage a situation where "the original is not made manifest to the beholder in an ideal, eternal state" so that "while reproduction initially 'deactivates' the original by removing it from its historical context, the original is reactivated when it encounters the beholder in a different context—the beholder's place and time—through reproduction."[8] Elaborating on these considerations in terms of the relationship between performance and documentation, when the reproduction, which may very well include documentation, is reinterpreted and placed in the audience's "place and time," its environment, as can be seen in Emile Zile's *Performer / Audience / Lens* (2018) performed at Unfold at LIMA in 2020, the original, in this case Dan Graham's 1977 version of *Audience / Performer / Mirror*, is, using Benjamin's term, not only reinterpreted but also reactivated. These considerations explain current thinking in terms of the relationship between performance and documentation, but also illustrate the importance of the audience, which in these two pieces is mirrored in the work, in the reactivation of performance, that both works, Graham's and Zile's, to some extent document.

Interestingly, the audience was acknowledged even in some of the earliest forms of documentation of performance, as can be seen by the work of photographers like Peter Moore and Babette Mangolte who both recognized the value of placing the audience in the images that subsequently so often stood for the work. Thus, while for Peter Moore, it was important to "do justice, as much as you are able to, to the intention of the artist"[9] by shooting documentation "from the point of view of someone in the audience in a 'normal' viewing position,"[10] Mangolte adopted the two organizational concepts of automatism and chance, though like Moore, she too aimed to "identify with the position of the spectator in the middle of the audience," trying to "capture the mental images that would become what an audience would likely remember of the piece," the so-called "'iconic' images for the piece."[11] Moore and Mangolte's documentation strategies—capturing the artist's intention as well as the position of the audience in the work—were profoundly influential in the way that the practice of performance documentation subsequently evolved and in establishing the role of the audience in the documentation of performance, defining the perspective we still use today to look at a work.

While the position of the audience in the work has been one of the principal focal points of documentation, and while documentation has played a burgeoning role in framing performance, especially for exhibition and conservation, the role of the audience in reactivation remains, however, largely undocumented and even when documented, sets of documentation are often not systematically collected or in the public domain. This means that, when it comes to conservation, the audience appears as the object rather than the subject of documentation. However, documentation not only of but also by the audience is especially important in

participatory or environmental works, where performance is often delegated to the audience or participants of various species, as well as in performative works more broadly, where the position, role and point of view of the audience (or, as I will show, even the non-human participants) are key towards building an understanding of what I have called here the environment of the work.

Nature, environment, climate—the environment of the work

In this section I aim to highlight the advantages of thinking of performances as environments and not only as events, occurrences or even constellations of documentation. Our environment is what surrounds us, but also the conditions under which we operate. To define what I mean by environment here I will draw on the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's reflections about the work of the biologist Jakob von Uexküll, an expert in animal behavior and the founder of ecology who wrote extensively about the concept of *Umwelt*, the German term for environment, which was later used by the semiotician Thomas Sebeok and the philosopher Martin Heidegger.[12] The term *Umwelt* (German for environment) indicates what is around us, pointing to a self-centered world or world as it is perceived by those within it. Von Uexküll was especially interested in researching how animals perceive their environment, arguing that organisms experience life in terms of species-specific "self-in-world" spatio-temporal frames which he called *Umwelt*. Thus, to him, *Umwelt* describes the perceptual world of an organism, the environment in which it is and in which it acts, suggesting that we tend to assume that the "self-in-world" of the animal is the same as ours, an assumption, Agamben suggests, that is based on the fact that we assume that there is only one world. In this sense, *Umwelt* is not a terrain, or a cartographic map, but a subjective, perceptual experience. For Uexküll the same environment perceived by humans is through the eyes of a fly or a mollusc significantly different.[13] As Agamben points out, the bee, the dragonfly or the fly that we observe do not in fact move in the same way as we think by observing them, since they do not share our space-time or our self-time.[14] Thus "self-in-world" spatio-temporal features which could include a wider range of points of views are essential to define the environment of a work.

When considering the environment of a work, we must consider its nature, which is in itself a contested term, implying a "materiality" (i.e. "rock, ocean, biota, atmosphere"), "process" ("causality, evolution or 'life itself'") and signification (e.g., "Eden").[15] Anthropologist Tim Ingold captures nature's paradoxical position in his seminal study *The Perception of the Environment* (2000) where, in a diagram showing nature's relation to culture, the term nature appears twice, as part of culture (what he calls "culturally perceived" nature) and as part of nature (what he calls "really natural" nature), thus visualizing that culture and nature "presuppose each other"[16] and that nature is both "here/now" *and* in culture. Nature therefore sits also broadly across these two fields, both the product of a subjectively perceived here and now, and part of wider cultural parameters. By considering a performance as an environment we would need to accept that its "nature" would similarly be located, paradoxically, in *both* nature and culture.

Performances are not only isolated events, they are also often reactivated and even reinterpreted. For this, it is useful to bring in the notion of climate. The phenomenologist Julian Knebusch introduced a framework for "climate" that expresses it in terms of phenomenological research as part of landscape, feeling and atmosphere.[17] Knebusch cites the philosopher of science Gernot Böhme who introduces an analogy between weather and landscape and argues that just as landscape expresses the human construction of nature, climate indicates a subject's viewpoint, thus constituting a "multidimensional phenomenon in which are combined the contributions of nature, culture, history and geography, but also the imaginary and the symbolic."[18] What is interesting here is that Knebusch discusses the distinction between landscape and climate, which, he claims, generate two similar but different views of the same phenomenon. Whereas landscape expresses, utilizing Ingold rather than Knebusch, the world as it is known by those who dwell within it, climate expresses not so much its meteorological equivalent, the weather, which indicates the present condition of a given climate (e.g., temperature, precipitation and wind), but rather the conjunction of historical, cultural, physical and geographical factors including temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, wind, rainfall and atmospheric particle count, among others. Building on Ingold and Knebush's findings, it is possible to suggest that whereas weather is of the here and now, it is part of our environment (and so subjectively perceived), climate indicates an average weather and its variations over a prolonged period of time (and is an abstraction, the product of modelling). By thinking of how a performance behaves over time, by considering, so to speak, its climate, it is possible to understand how it adapts or changes in time and whether, for example, its decay, which is ultimately unconservable, can be curated or managed.

Performance is both in nature and in culture. This means that to some extent performance is both inside and outside of culture. Seen as an environment, performance entails multiple "self-in-world" spatio-temporal features. This suggests that performance depends on the perceiving subject. To document performance, more contextual information is needed than is currently captured by most organizations. A performance may not only be formed by a single activation of a work but consists of its evolution over time. A performance is therefore formed by the history of its own occurrences. This suggests that a performance could be seen as an abstraction comprising possible future activations of an event. Understanding the position of the audience, their "self-in-world," their (and the work's) context, but also how the performance changes over time, are therefore key factors for the conservation of performance. This is especially important given that the subject affects the environment it documents, a factor which is related to what in physics is known as the observer effect, the disturbance of an observed system produced through the act of observation. In other words, the documentor is part of the environment of the work or, to put it differently, to document means to co-create or co-curate the environment of the work that is being documented. So, it is just as important to document the context of the documentation and acknowledge what is ultimately unconservable, as it is to document a work per se.

Conserving performance

In this section I revisit existing frameworks for the documentation and conservation of performance and illustrate how they can be built on to consider the environment of performance. The practice of documentation has changed significantly in recent years to adapt to some of the challenges presented by the acquisition and conservation of performance, and while the terms environment and climate have not been used in this context, it is interesting to note how some conservators are increasingly inclusive in their practice. Over the years, the presence of performance in museum collections has in fact prompted museums to develop new documentation strategies for conservation purposes. Originally documentation had entered museums primarily at the point of acquisition. Crucially, though, as Christiane Berndes, Curator and Head of Collection at the Van Abbemuseum, points out in her interview in *Histories of Performance Documentation* (2017), a lot of performance documentation that entered the museum in such ways, whether as photograph or videotape, over time became the work.[19] Clausen too explains in her essay in the same collection that documentation has played three functions in the history of museum practice: "initially as a press image, then as a historical document, and finally as a work of art."[20] In this sense, Clausen suggests, documentation is not "just a visual proof of an event," but, "projected into the future," it produces "the ability to comprehend the image as an index of its various future forms of existence as image, trace, and object."[21] Documentation, as she suggests, is therefore the image, or trace, or object that, in Rebecca Schneider's powerful phrasing, remains,[22] which can be presented or exhibited in the museum to reactivate the work. Joan Jonas's work is notoriously self-referential in that her new works often contain documents (including drawings, objects, films, etc.) created in previous works. Documentation could then act both as a trace of a past event *and* the prompt for a new event. Thus the Tate's installation of *Juniper Tree* (1976–1994), for example, includes some drawings made of the boy and girl who were protagonists of the piece in the original performance and which here were used as props. Forming part of the wider environment of the work, documentation should be considered as both past and future facing, playing a crucial factor in determining the archeology as well as a possible evolution of a work over time.

While the intention of the artist and the position of the audience in the work have formed the core of what performance documentation has tended to capture, alongside whatever objects or ephemera entered the museum at the point of purchase, in recent years attention has also focused on the identification of the network of people who, in caring for the work, can keep the work, so to speak, alive. Hence, more and more often do curators like Annie Fletcher, Chief Curator Van Abbemuseum, consider documentation as something that should be about *relations* between artists and their work but also between the artists, the works, their networks of care and the public.[23] At the same time museums have become increasingly interested in tracking the histories of performance works inside the museum where works are far from static, and often subject to change. The idea of a network of care has been explored by Annet Dekker in

her *Collecting and Conserving Net Art* (2018).[24] Networks of care are crucial in the fields of performance, digital arts, and in dance, where transmission has played a fundamental role in preserving the work for future generations. These innovative methods go towards considering performance as an environment comprising a range of viewpoints, including those involved in caring for the work over time.

Interestingly, over the last few years, a shift has occurred in the way that museums think of documentation. This shift is in line with current research in art history conceiving of a new method of documentation, a "biographical approach," which recognizes, as Renée van de Vall, Hanna Hölling, Tatja Scholte and Sanneke Stigter have suggested, that "the meaning of an object and the effects it has on people and events may change during its existence" so that we should construct the "lives" of these objects "as individual trajectories."[25] If the life of an object, an artwork or heritage more broadly, is formed by the individual trajectories that traverse it, then the mapping of these trajectories through documentation inside and indeed also outside of the museum becomes crucial to understanding the life of the work in the moment of performance, or presentation and exhibition, or when in storage, in the collection or indeed in the archive. Thus, museums have moved away from debates about the ontological relations between performance and documentation, privileging instead an understanding of documentation as a vehicle for conservation and so also future presentation and exhibition. However, documentation is still often treated as something different from performance, rather than as an entity that forms part of the same environment as performance. And while conservators are increasingly acknowledging the importance of managing change inside the museum it is still rare that iterations of works are preserved across different organizations or outside of the museum context.

A significant number of innovative approaches to performance documentation originated at the Tate, where Pip Laurenson, now Head of Collection Care Research, led between 2012 and 2014, with Social Scientist and Performance Studies researcher Vivian van Saaze, Collecting the Performative, a research network that examined emerging practices for collecting and conserving performance-based art, including dance, theater, and activism. This project was followed closely by Performance at Tate: Collecting, Archiving and Sharing Performance (2014–16), Documentation and Conservation of Performance (2016–21) and finally Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum project (2018–21) which all contributed to shaping the field of performance documentation at Tate and beyond. One of the legacies of Collecting the Performative was the Live List which provided prompts for those thinking about acquiring or displaying live works. The list recommends that artists are asked to provide a description of the work but specifies also "for someone who has never seen it before"; suggesting that the "basic parameters" of a work ("duration, space, number and nature of performers, variability") should be captured in this process alongside knowledge about how many forms the work exists in; whether the work evolves; whether it ought to be repeated; what the context is; how the work sits in the collection; and whether a

work is participatory, alongside questions about production, interpretation and audience.[26] Crucially, this framework for documentation takes into account not only, as had been the convention, the point of view of the artist but also the reception and variability of the work. Moving closer to acknowledging factors related to the environment and climate of the work, considering therefore the work as an environment as well as its broader environment and context, Tate now regards performance as an iterative form comprising both live events that occur at different points in time and documentation.

In line with her important 2006 paper "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations" in which Laurenson suggested that instead of preserving a work's authenticity, conservators should focus on its "identity,"[27] the Live List introduced novel documentation practices that brought to light a new understanding of how to think about the presence of performance in the museum. Thus, the Live List asks a series of questions about documentation itself which acknowledge its value in the activation of performance:

> what forms of documentation are available; what needs to be documented and for what purpose [...] how should the work be publicly expressed when not being performed [...]; how often should the documentation be reviewed; how is the documentation used in the reactivation of the work; is there a value in producing a testimony of the performance each time it is performed; [...]; Might it represent the work's legacy? Can it be shown with the work in the future.[28]

These questions show how rather than primarily thinking about the original performance conservators have started to think about future possibilities of activation. Conserving the work, in the case of performance, shifted from the conservation of a past event and rather moved on to the identification of what may be needed for new activations. Consequently, a future-oriented form of documentation started to be developed within the museum context which is less focused on notions of originality and reenactment as it is on the idea that artworks evolve, change and have different manifestations or activations and that perhaps this ability to change may form part of the work's lifespan, of what I described as the environment and climate of the work.

Eventually, the Tate Live List was used to develop the Performance Specification,[29] the first of three documentation frameworks, with the other two being the Activation Report and the Map of Interactions which together capture the relations involved in each performance and bring together documents often dispersed in different parts of the institution into a strategy that is both past and future facing.[30] The strategy moved away from the "idea of capturing the 'original' or first performance" and instead aimed to capture "the concept of the artwork" so that the work could be activated in years to come.[31] The Activation Report, "a blank template intended to be used to capture the work in action," and the Map of Interactions both include information about stakeholders involved in the activation, previous

activations and activations after acquisition.[32] The former describes the conditions for the activation, accounting also for other editions of the work, whereas the latter tracks networks of people both inside and outside of the museum who could variously care for the work. The term activation, rather than any term with the prefix "-re," is used now by Tate curators and conservators, in their words, "to describe the process of preparing the performance for display and presenting it in an active and live manner."[33]

Other museums, like the Guggenheim, have also acknowledged the "allographic" nature of time-based media conservation identified by Laurenson,[34] suggesting that decisions taken in the museum acknowledge that artworks are different each time they are installed. The Guggenheim's Identity Report, aimed at understanding a work's identity as well as its "behaviors under different circumstances," is thus accompanied by a series of Iteration Reports which intend to identify how the artworks change each time they are activated.[35] Interestingly, Iteration Reports do consider public reception, something now done also by other museums, such as the Met for example, so as to capture materials that may describe the works' behavior in specific exhibitions,[36] getting a step closer to what I have named here the environment of a work. Thus, grounded in the Matters and Media Art approach, MoMA's documentation strategies also include the gathering of artist, conservator and curator interviews, videos, sound and photos, including those taken with mobile phones by staff.[37] Their Identity Report, considered to be, in assistant media conservator Amy Brost's words, "an organic, living document," is meant to be a "dossier of the entire work," whose "life and evolution mirror that of the artwork," showing its complete production and exhibition history, whereas the Iteration Report, which at MoMA is called Display Documentation Report, "is a snapshot in the life of an artwork."[38] While these innovative documentation strategies go some way towards the documentation of the environment of the work, they still often don't capture audience-generated documentation and the context of the work (including the context for documentation). While they do go some way in acknowledging the work's behavior over time, usually, with the exception of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, they do not track works across different museums, or even outside of the museum. In this sense the documentation of these works is still very much a documentation of what happens to a work inside the museum and so, to some extent, it is a reflection about the museum's apparatus for conservation.

I have shown that performance is nowadays preserved by a number of museums through the conservation of the "identity" of the work, to use Laurenson's term, which is defined by conservators at the point of acquisition but is then also documented iteratively over time through contributions made by a range of stakeholders. It is important to consider that the identity of a work should be formed by its behavior across multiple environments. So, what is difficult to track in this context is not only the work's liveness but also the network of relations necessary to activate a work. Thus, interestingly, Laurenson and van Saaze noted that from the museum perspective it is not so much the non-materiality of performance that represents the greatest challenge but rather maintaining the "active engagement"

and "external memory" of the networks of people who support the work,[39] for it is this network that plays a crucial role in maintaining (and so also redefining) the identity of the work that plays such a critical role in its activation. These stakeholders though are part of the work's environment in that they curate the conditions under which a work operates over time.

The methods identified by museums for the documentation of performance are complex and generally effective. However, three factors may need to be considered to ensure that the conservation of these works becomes more future proof. More attention may need to be paid, first, to the role (and not just position) of the audience, participants, and networks of care, and the "self-in-world" spatio-temporal features that tend to become apparent through their documentation; second, to the role of the documentor and to documents that do not originate in museums (whether developed by artists and their collaborators or audiences), which may help to generate a more comprehensive set of parameters to define the context of the work not only from a single museum's perspective;[40] third, to the evolution of a work over time even when this occurs across sites (especially non-museum sites where the work adapts to the site) through reinterpretation or reenactment. I will dedicate the next section to unpacking what I mean by these recommendations through several case studies.

Documenting the environment of a work

In this section I further elaborate on the documentation of the environment and climate of a work. The examples I discuss are environmental and performative and so present specific challenges to do with decay due to environmental change. Decay is part of life itself and in view of the significant changes the world is facing, it is important to consider it as part of the way works are likely to change in years to come. To ensure this can be achieved, it is important to consider the wider environment of a work, by which I mean its position in both nature and culture. So the works considered are environmental, and hence subject to change, and my focus here is on their environment, i.e. their self-in-world.

Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) is one of the best-documented Land Art works, possibly because for many years the work kept disappearing and reappearing in the Great Salt Lake. At the time the work was created, Smithson employed the photographer Gianfranco Gorgoni to document the construction and finished work. The photos were subsequently widely disseminated and are reproduced in numerous studies of the work and, since between 1970 and 2000 the work was usually submerged, they have constituted the principal way for people to see the artwork. As the archivist Elisabeth England suggests, there is no longer an "original" work here in that the site changed very significantly[41] and it is difficult to interpret which level of "granularity to consider the content that makes *this* spiral jetty *Spiral Jetty*."[42] According to England, "rather than focussing on how to preserve the site," the question has been "what can be done to document the content of *Spiral Jetty*, even though its structure is subject to deterioration."[43] Thus, over time, the documentation of *Spiral Jetty* had, in

England's words, literally "shaped its interpretation and accessibility, while challenging the boundaries of content, context, and structure."[44] In many of Smithson's works, the environment of the work was formed by the Site, representing the location from which materials are taken, and the Nonsite, located in the gallery, which is displaced from the Site so that in the Site the viewer would see the materials constituting the Nonsite but would not be able to recognize the extraction forming the Nonsite whereas in the Nonsite the viewer could see the map or shape of the Site but not its location. Whereas the Site is open and in "some place," the Nonsite, possibly, in this case, formed by Smithson's essay and Nancy Holt's film, as well as Gorgoni's photographic documentation, is closed, in "no place."[45] Smithson's theorization of Site and Nonsite encapsulates Ingold's paradoxical positioning of nature in both nature and culture. A documentation of the environment of this work, including the changing relationship between its nature, culture and climate, might then include audience-generated documentation about their experience of the work under the water, over the water, and even without water and capture the evolving history of *their* perception of the work.

Deterioration and corrosion are a recurring theme in Smithson's work. Thus in her study of Land Art art historian Hanna B. Hölling suggests that "corrosion, rotting, eroding and diluting of forms" tend to form part of Land Art's "transitory, changing character."[46] Hölling cites *Amarillo Ramp*, another work by Smithson, which was completed by Nancy Holt, Richard Serra and Tony Shafrazi after Smithson died in a plane crash while surveying the site in 1973, and which has since dried out so much that, in Hölling's words, "the sculpture—a partial circle formed from rocks and earth—seems to melt into the terrain."[47] The artist and educator Jon Revett, who has been cutting mesquite off the sculpture for the last 20 years to preserve the work, now an assistant professor at West Texas A&M University, commented on the role played by documentation in this process:

> The form of the Ramp is a fragment of a vertical spiral, like the geological time spiral, of which humans are a minuscule part. We document our maintenance trips, giving us a visual record of the Ramp's evolution. The documentation of changes to the earthwork over time allows us to comprehend time on a grander scale. The continual interaction with the Ramp allows my student to glimpse a bigger picture of our universe. This educational benefit alone demands preservation.[48]

Thus, for both *Spiral Jetty* and *Amarillo Ramp*, the environment of the work consists of both the Sites and Nonsites, their respective documentation, including documentation by those involved in their, to use Dekker's expression again, networks of care, such as Revett's own reflections describing how his curation of the work allowed him and his students to conceive of the work not only in the moment but also over time. In this sense, engaging with the environment of the work and attending to its change and even decay enabled them to think about the

work's changing climate and their own roles as carers (or even performers) in relation to that. Revett's documentation, taken during each site visit, is a great example of what an audience-generated documentation could capture and a testimony as to the value of audience-led curatorial and conservation practices. These will be especially significant in years to come as a number of artworks, including the two by Smithson discussed here, are likely to be severely affected by climate change, requiring the intervention of different communities for conservation.

Influenced by Buckminster Fuller's *Dome Over Manhattan* (1960), Bay Area collective Ant Farm's *Air Emergency* took place at the *Clean Air Pod* (1970) at the Lower Sproul Plaza, University of California, Berkeley. Operating at the intersection of architecture, design and media art, Ant Farm are known for producing performances, videos, installations, time capsules, and texts. Using an inflatable pod to draw attention to the emergency caused by air pollution, the performers told the audience that the entirety of the world's atmosphere had been poisoned, and the only clean air was inside the inflatable, which was the only terrain that could be inhabited safely. Thus in the performance, the company stood outside of the pod, wearing gas masks, declaring the state of emergency through loudspeakers and telling everybody to go inside the giant bubble labelled "F310 clean air pod" or they would die within 15 minutes from an "air failure."[49] Small yellow circles were then attached to the "victims" who had remained outside and who were told the circles were sensors which could be monitored by a "Human Resources Satellite" which was "tracking your final

Figure 4.1. "Technicians" Shapiro and Gloger in front of the Ant Farm *Clean Air Pod*, Berkeley 1970 (first Earth Day).

movements."[50] Crucially, the work, including *Clean Air Pod* and the performance *Air Emergency*, was in part documented by Ant Farm through drawings, diagrams and ephemera, as well as videos, photos and interviews, but not much of this documentation is in the public domain and no analysis is available as to the legacy of the work, which is significant, in terms of its impact over subsequent environmental artists and activists. As museums are beginning to acquire and re-exhibit Ant Farm's work, this work ought to be reassessed and its impact documented and captured for posterity. A documentation of the environment of this work might involve including wider documents about the circumstances of the commission of this work, the student protest at Berkeley, the audience's responses to the work, the role played by Ant Farm in the emergence of environmental activism, and the legacy and impact of the work as interpreted by other artists.

Another work that is interesting to analyze in this context is Olafur Eliasson *Life* (2021), a site specific installation at the Fondation Beyeler which also had a

Figure 4.2. Olafur Eliasson *Life*, 2021. Water, Uranine, UV lights, wood, plastic sheet, cameras, kaleidoscopes, common duckweed (*Lemnar minor*), dwarf water-lilies (*Nymphaea tetragona, Nymphaea 'Pygmaea Rubra', Nymphaea 'Ellisiana'*), European frog bit (*Hydrocharis morsus-rana*), European water clover (*Marsilea quadrifolia*), floating fern (*Salvinia natans*), red root floater (*Phyllanthus fluitans*), shellflower (*Pistia stratiodes*), South-American frog bit (*Limnobium laevigatum*), and water caltrop (*Trapa natans*) Installation view: Fondation Beyeler Photograph: Mark Niedermann Courtesy of the artist; neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles © 2021 Olafur Eliasson.

multi-channel livestream introducing alternating perspectives of the work. The work intends to "present a model for a future landscape."[51] Eliasson commented,

> When Sam Keller, the Director of the Fondation Beyeler, and I first dis-
> cussed the exhibition a couple of years ago, I thought, "Why don't we
> invite everyone to the show? Let's invite the planet – plants and various
> species." Beyond just opening a door, I decided to remove the structural
> boundaries that keep the outside out of the institution, and I am grateful to
> the Fondation Beyeler and to the architect Renzo Piano, who built the
> museum, for trusting me to carefully – and caringly – have the glass facade
> removed from the building. Together with the museum, I am giving up
> control over the artwork, so to speak, handing it over to human and non-
> human visitors, to plants, microorganisms, the weather, the climate – many
> of these elements that museums usually work very hard to keep out.
> Instead, we are trying to welcome everyone and everything in.[52]

Eliasson's *Life* is just that, life itself, inhabiting the work, and continuously transforming it. Here, the work's decay may over time become part of the work itself. The intention of the artist is documented through interviews, currently available on his website and social media, while audience responses are pri-marily captured through social media, which means that it is unlikely that they will be preserved. Interestingly, Time-Based Media Conservator Emilie Magnin pointed out that when she visited the installation with her father, a biologist, he kindly asked a guard if he could step into the green water to rescue a very large—and rare—bug from drowning and apparently not only did the guard accept, but also she asked for a picture and identification of the bug in order to add it to the documentation the museum kept on human and non-human interactions with the work.[53] This documentation could, if extended, capture more information about the experience of the non-human selves-in-world and so offer a radically different map of the work's reception that would tell us more about the evolving environment of the work.

I hope to have shown here that the relationship between a work and the environment in which it is shown is porous and so much more fluid than we may have so far assumed, and that this porousness has an impact on the work. However, in their documentation for the museum, works are often abstracted and captured as identities that could be shown in multiple localities regardless of factors that have to do with the original environment in which the work was created or subsequent environments in which the work was activated. The environment of a work, the conditions under which the work operates, con-stitutes a crucial factor towards building an understanding of a work. While iterative documentation practices are beginning to capture the changing envir-onment of works over time, they still don't fully do justice to the context of the work's reception and the plurality of voices involved in it, or the network of care that will make the work sustainable over time. In other words, the nature and culture of a work must both be documented, since the two are inextricably

intertwined. This may be what Roman Ondák was suggesting in *Loop* (2009) which was created during the artist's participation in the 53rd Venice Biennale. Here, Ondák took the garden surrounding the pavilions in the Biennale and reproduced it inside the structure he was commissioned to design. The result was that the inside of the Cezch and Slovak Pavillion was the same as the outside. This powerful work sums up the complexity of this field, which I described when referring to Ingold's diagram in which nature appears twice, as part of culture ("culturally perceived" nature) and as part of nature ("really natural" nature), both operating as separate and yet interconnected entities.

In her essay on time and conservation, Hölling points out how often the purpose of restoration or conservation has been the freezing of a work to the particular moment at which it entered the collection, based on the traditional understanding that the artwork is "locked in time,"[54] capturing its "ideal state" in time.[55] Performance, we know, does not behave like that and, as in the case of the environmental works I described, changes depending on the behavior of its site(s) and over time, largely because the environment or its reception also change over time. But these changes are not only a fact the artwork is subject to, they might also be an active quality that the artwork was designed to have. In other words, we may wish to think of art as active, not passive with a migrant identity that is capable of travelling across multiple environments. The art critic and curator Germano Celant's final book project contained a fragment that is relevant here. This was published in April 2021 in *La Repubblica*. Celant wrote that the works he curated throughout his career were not "concluded" but "fluid and flexible, capable through their 'elasticity' of taking on new forms depending on the architecture or to turn the architecture into a 'stage' to survive." These works were, in his words, "open," able to have "a performative character, depending on the scene of the exhibition." The latter, he continued, then "becomes 'participant' in the work." Thus, he concluded: "The work is not a 'parcel' which travels from one site to another, but a nomad entity which must adapt to the resources offered by the place."[56] For him, the work reshapes itself according to the environment in which it can take place. These considerations are crucial, for they consider the environment of the work, both inside and outside the museum, as an active, adaptable agent in the work showing that it should therefore also be a crucial element of the documentation of a work. By documenting the environment of a work we are ultimately acknowledging a factor that is often considered un-conservable, nature itself.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown what an important role documentation plays for the conservation of performance and why we may still wish to perfect the practice of documentation by documenting the environment and evolving climate of the work. As geographer Caitlin DeSilvey writes in her study *Curated Decay* (2017), we may need a "reevaluation of our commitment to perpetual material protection"[57] in that "processes of decay and disintegration can be culturally (as

well as ecologically) productive."[58] Decay, that which is ultimately un-conservable, perhaps should be part of what we document when considering, alongside the audience, the context and change, which I have called here the environment of a work.

   To conclude, I hope these considerations have shed light on the complex debate about the relationship between performance and documentation. I have argued that documentation needs to consider the environment of the work, its "locatedness" in nature as well as in culture, its self-in-world, and its changing behavior over time. To further elucidate how the two sit in relation to each other, I would like to cite here the literary critic Frank Kermode's well-known comment on the passing of time. Thus, he said: "The clock's tick-tock I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organization that humanizes time by giving it form; and the interval between tock and tick represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort that we need to humanize."[59] Maybe the relationship between performance (in nature) and documentation (in culture) then, in the context of conservation, is like the relationship between the tick and the tock. They are both the same and yet they are so different, as one is ephemeral and ultimately ungraspable while the other is part of our culture, and still without one we do not comprehend the other.

Notes

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5 Innovation and preservation

Shadreck Chirikure on the performance of heritage—A conversation with Hanna B. Hölling

Shadreck Chirikure is an archeologist and a leading scholar in discourses surrounding the politics of knowledge production in archeology and heritage. Professor of Archeological Science in the Research Laboratory for Archeology and the History of Art, University of Oxford (where he holds a British Academy Global Professorship), he also acts as Adjunct Professor of Archeology at the University of Cape Town. His research methodology combines hard sciences with humanities and social sciences to explore ancient African technologies and political economies of precolonial state and non-state systems. In his current research, he focuses on the precolonial urban landscapes at two World Heritage Sites in southern Africa, Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe and their place in African and international trade networks. Chirikure is the author of *Great Zimbabwe: Reclaiming a "Confiscated" Past* (Routledge, 2021) and is co-editor (with Webber Ndoro and Janette Deacon) of *Managing Africa's Heritage: Who Cares?* (Taylor & Francis, 2018). In this conversation, we discussed the ideas behind the preservation of performance, practice and heritage. Chirikure addresses heritage as a living and ever-changing inheritance, in which performance itself is the key to conservation.

Hanna Hölling: Shadreck, thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. Our research project Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge explores the idea that performance persists not only as object, archive and documentation, but also as an event, oral tradition and gesture. We have been impressed by your insights into different notions of heritage and your observation that heritage may have different meanings for different people.[1] Your scholarship on Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Zimbabwe's heritage and archeology, has shown that heritage is viewed as an active and living entity. In this conversation, I'd like to think with you about the performance of heritage and heritage as performance, as I believe this will provide us with a valuable perspective on how we approach conservation in general, and the conservation of performance in particular, both within Western institutions and beyond.

Shadreck Chirikure: The ideas of, or attitude to, preservation and conservation differ depending on various cultures and geopolitical settings. The ideas dominating in Europe and in the West are derived from the Enlightenment tradition. For example, the ideas of John Ruskin and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc imply that you

cannot falsify the historical record, the historic document, and that if you are not preserving it, you are going to lose it. Those ideas were extended into the other parts of the world through colonialism and through international best practices such as the Venice charter and the 1972 UNESCO Convention. Then, if I'm to go back to my village and think about what preservation and the intangible heritage or performance are, the main idea that comes up is that preservation is through use. That is how you are going to sustain intangible heritage: you perform it, you use it. This understanding is quite opposite to the Ruskinian idea of "this is old, so don't touch it." If you wish to keep a performance as something that was done by your ancestors and which now belongs to you, you must perform it—that's how you continue heritage. Otherwise, it gets abandoned and forgotten.

The idea of preservation as use and innovation, which is associated with performance, is a major point of contrast with the notion of authenticity, with the idea that, in order to preserve an authentic performance or a tradition, you need to freeze them. There's nothing like that. Innovation is a part of pre-servation. And, importantly, regardless of whether it's intangible heritage or tangible heritage, performance as preservation by use is most significant. Think of Timbuktu where the walls are plastered periodically and this process is part of a cycle that brings life into a building. Think about the dances and mas-querades in West Africa, and in parts of Central Africa such as Malawi. These performances have to be performed, they have to be used, because otherwise people will forget them. Intangible heritage and traditions such as wall plas-tering, or rain ceremonies, cannot be frozen. The more people use and perform them, the more they preserve. Keeping those behaviors alive in people's daily routine and memory is also what intergenerational exchange is all about. This is how the young learn from the old and how the old will pass on this knowl-edge to the young and to the upcoming generations. That's how preservation works. It is not conditioned by the Venice charter or the Burra charter.

HH: The concept of preservation through performance is fascinating. In my work with contemporary art and media, I frequently encounter changeable works. Performance art—particularly within the visual art tradition—is per-ceived as continually changing and fluctuating. We tend to talk less about an "authentic object." Furthermore the notion of "loss" in relation to change is being revaluated. However, if we consider a scenario in which performance changes indefinitely, to the point where we can no longer discern whether it is still the same or a different performance, how can we meaningfully grapple with the notion of change? If preservation occurs through people and is inter-generational, passing knowledge about the work from one generation to the next, how can we effectively address the challenges posed by change?

SC: But why would you like for the performance to remain unchanged? The idea is that each generation is responsible and is custodian of their own per-formance. If this is the masquerade, for instance, you do it using the materials available to your generation. And another generation, doing this performance, will use different materials available to their generation. There is no need to fix things. Loss is when a practice is lost, when people are no longer gathering

under a tree to perform a dance. Loss is when the missionaries started to say to people: "No, no, no, this is devilish, this is Antichrist, this is anti-white! You can't do this performance, or you can't do this dance!" But there is no loss as long as people are performing and modifying their practice.

The process of heritage is ongoing. Heritage is created every second, every minute, every day. Whatever unit of time you use, heritage is being created. We create heritage through the everyday, the mundane and through the ritual. Heritage is made and remade. There is no need to fix things. Why should we be afraid of change? Change is a part of heritage. Each generation looks at the same culture and the same materials from its own position. That's what makes heritage dynamic and what connects people with heritage. The problems occur if you were saying "Do what your grandmother was doing, do what your grandfather was doing." There is an important issue of relationship: How do you relate to that heritage? Take, for instance, Stonehenge: no one identifies with Stonehenge, it's just a circle of stones. Thank God, there are druids, who sometimes can say "Maybe this is what Stonehenge once was," but no one else identifies with the structure. And then, authorship is claimed over heritage. You say, "That is ours." But how is it yours, if you can't perform it? As generations succeed each other and as people find what appeals to them in heritage, heritage is performed. Through this performance, heritage becomes not only relevant, but also sustained. That's linked with the concepts of curation and co-production. We should let people perform their heritage and let them innovate, without fixing practices or traditions in time and space, because these things cannot be fixed. Great dancers and great musicians are great improvisers. These are people who go against the script, and that creativity is at the center of performance and heritage. So, you can't say that in a practice characterized by innovation, you have to stick to what someone saw in 1950 as being the authentic experience. This is where we disconnect people from their heritage. As long as we connect, we encourage people to perform, that is preservation through use. Such preservation also connects people to some of those cultural practices. If you take, for example, churches in the Western world, you realize that in some contexts, people no longer go to church and those buildings are no longer being used. So why should they be sustained? As long as people are using the churches and continue the tradition of going to church and worshipping every Sunday, that's an example of the preservation of tradition through use. The moment people stop doing this, they kill the practice. The idea of preservation through use also applies in the Western world, there is nothing exceptional about the West, except that people should learn to understand that heritage is performed, heritage is used. If this is not being done, heritage is either killed, or you are creating something different that people don't identify with.

HH: Your assertion that African heritage revolves around performance is intriguing, particularly as you suggest that those who are more creative and skilled at improvisation are held in higher esteem as performers. I must question the practical implications of this perspective, however: If the future generations inherit practices or performances that have been significantly altered—

such as a new dance or an entirely different ritual—would these still be accepted as a continuation of the original cultural practice, or would they be considered a distinct cultural expression altogether?

SC: What if the next generation decides to innovate on a dance tradition and say, "Instead of moving my right foot first I must start by moving my left foot." Does this represent continuity? The crucial point to consider is that people—my grandfather or my great grandmother—are no longer alive to witness these changes. This is about us in the present. And then why not give the future generations the chance to choose what *they* want to do with the dance? Why should one generation think that it has the moral, philosophical, ethical rights to say that what they have seen is what all the future generations should enjoy? Do your dance the way you want but let those in the following generation also dance. If that is the same dance, a dance with the same name but a dance that has been improved, if this dance works for this future generation, that's continuity. Continuity is not about stopping change, improvisation, or creativity. To the contrary, continuity embraces change. And it embraces stasis, too. If people feel there is no need for a practice to change, so be it. We have celebrated many heritages in the past. For example, the heritage of perpetual consumption and a practice of collecting objects. Now we are saying, "Oh, hang on, this is at the expense of great damage to the planet." And we contend, "This performance is not good, let us change it— this is not a good type of heritage." There is continuity because we still continue to manufacture things and thus we continue to perform this heritage, but now with the consciousness of endangering the home we call Earth. So, are we going to insist on continuity by burning more fossil fuels? Will we insist that we must go on along those lines? I don't think so.

HH: In light of your previous statement, it is worth considering that each generation should determine whether to preserve a heritage object or pursue a drastic change in performance. As you suggest, we must allow the future generations to dance their dance and to shape tradition according to their own vision. Not unrelatedly, I'm also contemplating the Western conservation tradition and whether, at a meta-level, it constitutes a form of performance. Within this framework, we perform the preservation of works in specific conditions and enact the freeze-paradigm based on the knowledge criteria established within the epistemic cultures of their time. The performance of conservation provides a valuable tool for self-reflection and helps us understand who we are as humans in a constantly changing world.

Your answer has anticipated my following question concerning time and its potential impact on our approach to the ongoing life of performance, or to the performance of conservation. If, as you imply, the past is present both in the present and in the future (resonating with my own ideas influenced by Henri Bergson's concept of *durée*), how might this concept apply to the continuity of performance, ritual, dance or technique?

SC: The biggest question is, what is time, anyway? From a Western sense, you can say that there are millisecond, seconds, minutes, hours and days, but

what does that all do, at the end of the day? Seconds, minutes, hours and days repeat. And then there are cycles: a year that repeats and then seasons that repeat… Time seems both cyclical and linear. But how does it affect the notions of heritage and continuity? The key aspect is that each generation learns from the generation that preceded it and makes its own additions to heritage. So, when thinking about time, not only is the present informed by the past, but it also creates its own identity. And then, heritage is handed over to an imaginary future. Generations overlap, you might also have your grandparents, and you might have grandchildren and so on. So, under those circumstances, how to define a future? This affects how time can be grasped. There is an understanding that time is change, and that the past might not always be the past, the present might not always be the present and the future might not always be the future. And at the center of all this, there is the concept of preservation by use: if you keep on performing the ritual, then you are also preserving it. Continuity is an arena for innovation and contestation.

This takes me to the concept of performance of conservation that you mentioned. In the museum—think of the 1900s or the 1950s—people were applying harmful chemicals to objects, in the very well-meaning intention to prolong the lives of the objects. Should this practice continue because it was performed in the past? No, we introduce change. "Western exceptionalism" doesn't really work. Even in the West, one can still make the argument that performance is through use and through practice. When you realize that these chemicals are harmful then you modify the practice. There is no need to fix things in space and time and say that this is how it was done.

To go back to the concept of time, yes, we need to allow things to change, and, at the same time, we need to allow things to remain the same. That's all part of the creative process and what makes the performance of heritage and culture resilient. It is the sum of all those contradictions—that in one way you try to change and to innovate and in another you try to keep the same—that constitutes the southern African value system. People say, "Well, we learned from what happened before us, we use that to improve what we are doing, and we will hand over whatever we can to the people who are coming after us." And these future generations will also look at these traditions and practices that they inherited and hand over to the next group, and the cycle will continue. If time is understood in that way, then it makes it worth the while in terms of each generation enjoying what is heritage and what is performance, namely the act of handing over the practices and allowing others to perform them in their own way. Here, in the West, we talk about democracy and the idea of choice, but in conservation, we don't want to give people choice. That's counterintuitive.

HH: We are also intrigued by the relationship between archeology and preservation. Is archeology a form of preservation? How are the actions of the past societies—such as daily chores, rituals, dances and conservational efforts—recorded in the archeological record? How do artifacts either assist or impede our comprehension of the dynamic aspects of the people who created them?

SC: The short answer is that archeology deals with mute objects, buildings, or ruins. You can't ask the people who engaged with a room or a space about

how they did it, since they are long gone. Therefore, archeologists attempt to bring back those gestures to life through interpretation. To reveal the performances that people were doing in the past depends on the models archeologists use to get to those questions. If we were to take, for instance, a Marxist interpretation to understand and reconstruct the economic practices in Great Zimbabwe, then that's a completely different performance altogether. Interpretation is performance and a reconstruction of Great Zimbabwe is an entirely different performance. In the past, people were living their lives, and, if you are lucky, in some areas there were written records that might support the work of archeologists.

Archeology is performance, too, although there are rules. We might refer to an agreed-upon standard of performance, which prescribes how archeology is done. But that's why we need to bring in various perspectives, because they will bring in different types of performance, which will then bring in varying types of heritage and ways of understanding and knowing. Sometimes the views meet, sometimes they collide, but it is still a part of the same performance. Why shouldn't we accept the belief that people came out from the hole in the ground? Why should we say, "This doesn't work," imposing our value system? Why, rather than marginalize those voices, shouldn't we bring in different worldviews and understand that objects might perform differently for different people? Rather than following one way which hinders multiplicity, a democratic system of knowledge would enhance our understanding of the past, bringing in different dimensions to the performance of what we call archeology. This might help in terms of preservation. I might not identify or agree with your performance. But, nevertheless, other performances that differ from our own can help us look after the same object. Building and sustaining resilience is key and takes place through co-production and co-use. They take us away from the pitfalls of having unilateral or one-sided philosophies and ways of doing things.

HH: In a previous conversation you mentioned that magic is also an integral part of heritage performance.[2] Considering this, how can the preservation of heritage, and of performance, incorporate the inclusion of magic?

SC: Magic and ritual are about practice. And then, there are tangible remains, like nails and onions, which can be found in the Pitt Rivers Museum.[3] The practice of magic and the material remains are two sides of a spectrum. When people stopped their practices of making nails, this is when the performance stopped. What is left are mute objects which can only be enlivened through interpretation. So again, the moment the practice stops, is the moment when the heritage dies.

HH: Could the use of these objects by a museum not be considered as a form of heritage performance?

SC: The museums kill heritage, because, in the museums, we seal heritage objects in glass vitrines, wear white gloves and follow rules, "Do this, do that." We freeze heritage. But that's not what the druids do—they are creative, they reenact, they perform. Heritage is not meant to be kept in a cabinet. Whether in Pitt Rivers or elsewhere, the museums have now commenced to connect with communities, "Please can you come and engage with these objects? Can you

come and perform your rituals, can you do your magic?" Again, heritage is performance, heritage is use. Otherwise, it is dead.

HH: This is a wonderful conclusion to our conversation. Thank you so much.

This conversation was conducted in January 2022. Questions contributed by Jules Pelta Feldman and Emilie Magnin. Editorial assistance from Emilie Magnin.

Notes

1 Shadreck Chirikure, "Heritage in Our Language: 'Universal Concepts,' Local Performativity and the Freezing of Discourse and Practice at World Heritage Places in Africa," presentation at the conference Heritage, Participation, Performativity, Care, Centre for Critical Heritage, UCL London, March 12, 2021.
2 Chirikure, "Heritage in Our Language."
3 The Pitt Rivers Museum, located in Oxford, England, displays anthropological and archeological objects of the University of Oxford. Founded in 1884, it encompasses more than 500,000 objects, manuscripts and photographs, many of which are of ritual significance in the cultures that created them. The display of the museum is arranged by type of objects rather than by chronology or geographic belonging. The onion amulet mentioned here carries the inventory number 1917.53.776.

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Part II

The politics and institutions of care

6   An experimental acquisition

Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room* (2014) at the Walker

Iona Goldie-Scot

In 2014 the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota embarked on what they described as an "experimental acquisition" of Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room* (2014), a live work comprising elements of performance, visual art, music and text. According to the Walker's staff members, the intention was that no physical components of the work, such as props, would be acquired; instead, staff spoke about how they hoped to gather a collection of memories from those who participated in the work in some way, whether as curatorial staff, a museum guard, performer or audience member.[1] Such an approach clearly values the input of various voices beyond the field of conservation in documentation strategies and yet also raises a series of questions and challenges concerning ownership and responsibility. For instance, if no physical entity enters the permanent collection, what responsibility does the art institution have for the longevity of the artwork? For many decades, museum engagement with performance art consisted of commissioning and display, and the acquisition of material representations either originating from or of the work. It was not until the early 2000s that museums first started to explore the acquisition of performances in and of themselves.[2]

Such acquisitions contradict established models of care and conservation in the museum whereby artwork longevity was long assumed to reside in preservation of an artwork's physical integrity: loss is minimized by minimizing change.[3] It is only comparatively recently, coinciding with the rise of time-based media art, that the conservation discourse has shifted away from the idea of conservation as a scientific, objective, materials-based process and widened to encompass notions of the transmission of knowledge, whether tacit or explicit, and a recognition of conservation as a socially constructed activity with multiple stakeholders.[4] The idea of gathering a collection of memories, as the Walker intended, reflects this shift in thinking. The Walker not only declined to take ownership of the props involved in the work but also emphasized their lack of ownership of the work itself. Why was this non-material approach seen as preferable and how does it compare to alternative performance acquisition processes at the Walker and beyond, in which physical ephemera, or else the rights and score for the purposes of future reenactment, are acquired?

   This chapter traces the Walker's acquisition of this work and examines some of the challenges of acquiring and caring for performance artworks within the workings of a traditional art institution that nonetheless has a long and established history of performance curation, having been actively commissioning performance art and acquiring ephemera since the 1960s. Using this case as a foundation, I explore the ways in which performance works are asking for institutional change and investigate the changes that might be necessary for museums to effectively care for such works in their collections. There has been a long-standing tendency within the field of performance scholarship to center on the transience of performance, emphasizing its fleeting nature and its inevitable disappearance.[5] While not denying the importance of such debates, this chapter shifts the argument away from the dichotomy between presence and disappearance towards a study of how art institutions care for performance artworks within their collections *in practice*. In order to so, I will introduce theories of infrastructure from Science, Technology and Society Studies (STS) to investigate organizational conditions in museums and the shifts necessary to incorporate performance artworks into the traditional structures, narratives and roles of the art institution. In doing so, I aim to shed new light on methods for conserving performance-based works via different forms of documentation and the transmission of knowledge, as well as demonstrate what this case in particular can tell us about institutions and their aspirations versus the realities.

A hybrid artwork in a hybrid institution

During the planning phase of *Scaffold Room*, Ralph Lemon described it as

> "a flexible architectonic room-space." A para-theater, also a lecture hall, a screening room, a very large, mirrored installation, a space to reflect really, and a bunk bed, a place to sleep. It is a self-contained place. I can take this space, this thing, performance anywhere I want. Almost.[6]
>
> In September 2014, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis presented the premiere of *Scaffold Room*, a hybrid, multimedia artwork, part theater and part gallery installation, enacted in and around the confined, constructed environment of the "scaffold room" itself, a stand-alone cage-like structure with an upper deck holding a mattress reachable by ladder.

The work debuted in a classic white cube, as opposed to the onsite theater (The William and Nadine McGuire Theater) and was described in the Center's press materials as a "lecture-performance-musical," as well as an exhibition. It engaged with audiences in multiple ways over a five-day run. Audience members could attend evening-length ticketed performances, more in keeping with traditional performing arts, or chance upon spontaneous daily "refractions," the word used by (then) Assistant Curator of Visual Arts Bartholomew Ryan to describe "performative vignettes that explode various gestures and scenes from the ticketed performance, and take place spontaneously throughout the

Figure 6.1 Rehearsal of Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room*, September 16, 2014. *Scaffold Room* by Ralph Lemon (mixed media). Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Clinton and Della Walker Acquisition Fund, 2015. Image courtesy of Ralph Lemon and Walker Art Center.

exhibition."[7] The vacant scaffold structure also served as a stand-alone sculptural installation. To the left of the scaffold was a movable projection screen and to the right-hand side, a lectern; on the floor were a record player and microphone on a stand.

The work merges live and video performance, combining styles and characteristics of a lecture, performance and musical concurrently. Although conceived and directed by Lemon, the refractions and ticketed performances were performed in 2014 by artist, performer and choreographer Okwui Okpokwasili, with whom Lemon had frequently collaborated, and April Matthis, an actress and writer. The performances of Okpokwasili and Matthis drew upon language and source materials (sometimes quoted directly and sometimes interpreted) from iconic figures of popular entertainment, science fiction and history, including Beyoncé, Moms Mabley, Amy Winehouse, Kathy Acker, Adele, Ben Webster and Samuel R. Delany, all with a focus on and around assumptions about prescribed cultural body politics. Their live performances were interspersed with video footage of a rural Mississippi Delta community, featuring then 86-year-old Edna Carter and her extended family, with whom the artist shares a long history.[8]

In press coverage *Scaffold Room* was described as "a gorgeous, terrifying choreography of desire, obsession, violence, failure and prosaic beauty; an accumulation of erotic, racial psychic and cultural values crashing and receding one against the other."[9] My own experience of the work was arrived at via

Figure 6.2 Rehearsal of Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room*, September 16, 2014. *Scaffold Room* by Ralph Lemon (mixed media). Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Clinton and Della Walker Acquisition Fund, 2015. Image courtesy of Ralph Lemon and Walker Art Center.

video documentation rather than witnessing it live. Counter to Phelan's well-known argument that "performance's only life is in the present,"[10] I find viewing of archival footage a highly satisfactory method of familiarizing myself with works. Thus, in agreement with Auslander's understanding of documentation as a formative aspect of the original performance,[11] I studied the photo and video documentation to be found in the Walker's archives, which included seventy minutes of video footage of *Scaffold Room*.

   In this I encountered Okpokwasili and Matthis as they performed an ever-evolving assemblage of characters, narratives and monologues, sometimes present within, atop, or beside the scaffold structure and at other times appearing in film footage projected onto the screen behind them. The work appeared to be inherently interdisciplinary, crossing the boundaries between theater and the visual arts via the various ways in which to experience the work (daily refractions versus full length performances) and through the impression of a "set" alongside spontaneous encounters in a gallery space.

   Crossing the boundaries between theater and the visual arts is not uncommon at the Walker. As a multidisciplinary art center (the Center's own term), the Walker has long presented works across the visual, performing and media arts. The Walker's long-standing commitment to the performing arts makes it rather distinct when compared to its peer institutions. The Walker was one of the first institutions in the world to establish a separate curatorial department dedicated

Figure 6.3 Rehearsal of Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room*, September 16, 2014. *Scaffold Room* by Ralph Lemon (mixed media). Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Clinton and Della Walker Acquisition Fund, 2015. Image courtesy of Ralph Lemon and Walker Art Center.

to contemporary performing arts back in 1970.[12] This far predates decisions by many of the leading global art museums to establish positions and departments dedicated solely to the performing arts. The Whitney, for example, only appointed their first curator of performing art in 2012, MoMA in 2013 and it was not until 2017 that the Stedelijk appointed a Curator of Contemporary Art for Time-Based Media, despite being one of the first to acquire a live work (see note 2). Likewise, *Tate Live* was not introduced until 2003 and it is only in the last decade that many museums have begun to build new spaces with an eye towards displaying live art.[13]

Originally a private collection, and for a period known as the Walker Art Gallery, it was rechristened as the Walker Art Center in 1940. Today, the Walker presents contemporary visual arts and design exhibitions, dance, theater, music performances and film screenings, and is one of the five most-visited modern/ contemporary art museums in the United States. The museum's permanent collection includes over 13,000 modern and contemporary art pieces, including painting, sculpture, media works, photography, drawings, books, performance ephemera and more recently live performance works.

According to the Walker, their early foray into displaying and commissioning contemporary performing arts "helped establish now-common national practices, such as commissioning work from leading artists and providing in-depth artistic and developmental residencies."[14] Given the burgeoning presence of performance at contemporary art institutions in the United States (and across the globe), this claim has some merit.

As mentioned earlier, the Walker has been actively presenting and commissioning performing arts since the 1960s.[15] To date, the Walker has commissioned more than 260 new performance works, including works by Sarah Michelson, Eiko & Koma, Robert Wilson and Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.[16] In addition to commissioning, the Walker has also acquired a variety of performance ephemera, including pieces by Meredith Monk, Trisha Brown, Cynthia Hopkins, some 400 Fluxus-related objects, relics, posters and photographs and notably the comprehensive collection of sets, props and costumes from the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, acquired in 2012.[17] Despite this extensive commissioning activity and the acquisition of performance ephemera, it was not until 2008 that the Walker acquired its first live performance, instigated by the visual arts department: Tino Sehgal's *This objective of that object* (2004). The acquisition of *Scaffold Room* was thus only its second undertaking of a live performance acquisition.

Ralph Lemon (b. 1952), himself originally from Minneapolis, has had a relationship with the Walker Art Center for nearly twenty years. The Walker has presented numerous projects by Lemon, including the artist's global dance-theater trilogy, in-gallery performances, multiple commissions and residencies, and has commissioned digital art and acquired a major video work.[18] Longstanding Senior Curator of the Performing Arts, Philip Bither, has known Lemon since the late 1990s, when they were both in New York and when Lemon's postmodern dance company, the Ralph Lemon Company, was still active.

Lemon is known for his cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary work, bridging the gap between the contemporary dance and visual art worlds throughout his

career as a dancer and choreographer. In 1995 Lemon disbanded his eponymous dance company in order to pursue his increasing interest in challenging the prescribed model of a performance piece and its positioning on the stage as opposed to in the gallery; he wrote to his followers announcing "a shift to a new, multidisciplinary, and project-based model for making work."[19] His three-part *Geography Trilogy*[20] followed. Prior to this point Lemon had performed and exhibited in more traditional "black box" performance spaces.[21] From 1996 onwards however Lemon's works were increasingly shown in visual arts settings, including at the Walker, MoMA, New York and the Hayward Gallery and the Victoria Miro Gallery in London, and these works were progressively boundary pushing, consisting of performances-cum-installations-cum-mixed media works.

The Walker's long-standing support of Lemon's works would suggest that this acquisition was not so "experimental" after all. Nevertheless, despite the Walker's established expertise in commissioning and presenting performance, and indeed, its experience in showing works by Lemon, the acquisition of *Scaffold Room* proved to be quite a challenge to the institution's established practices. Unlike the majority of their previous performance acquisitions, the aim was not to collect physical components or representations of the work. And while the Walker had previously acquired a work by Tino Sehgal, members of staff revealed that they had yet to present the work due to its challenging nature.[22] In the acquisition of both Sehgal and Lemon's works, the Walker is not claiming ownership over the work, in contrast with the acquisition of more conventional object-based works or material performance ephemera.

The acquisition

It was in a published interview between art historian Jonah Westerman and several of the Walker's curators that the acquisition of Lemon's *Scaffold Room* was described as "experimental."[23] Bither stated in the interview:

> We worried that [the *Scaffold Room*] acquisition would limit the future of who would get to see that work and where the artist could place it. We wanted to honor the memories and the experience of what that real-time event was and meant for people, so we suggested a real-time acquisition of the Minneapolis edition of *Scaffold Room* in which we conducted extensive documentation involving interviews with all those involved in the creation: the curators, performers, the audience, the guards, the people wandering by during the day when it was being rehearsed—all that will end up functioning as a score that we are in the process of constructing with the artists themselves. [And] that will be a kind of map of memories.[24]

What sets the acquisition of *Scaffold Room* apart from previous acquisitions is the focus on the non-material and the recognition of the significance of a variety

of stakeholders' experiences of the work. The idea was that no physical components of the work would be collected; instead, the staff of the Walker set out to create a large score "developed dramaturgically that relates to three years of development and three weeks of experiences in the galleries, combined with extensive video documentation."[25] For Lemon this approach was important in exploring questions of value within the context of a collecting institution. In Ryan's words, it was an opportunity to ask, "How does one collect performance in a way that privileges memory over objecthood? To put it another way, how does one remove the proprietorial from the concept of ownership?"[26] The idea of negotiating and exposing distinct tropes in the fields of visual, on the one hand, and performing arts, on the other, is a recurring feature of this case and also of Lemon's practice over the years, since he has consistently rendered "porous the boundaries between visual and performing arts."[27] In addition to his experimentation with performing in visual arts settings, Lemon organized the *Value Talks* series at MoMA, New York in 2013 and 2014, which considered the place of dance with its anti-object, ephemeral nature within the museum, in conversation with various artists, scholars and curators.[28]

When reflecting on what it means for the institution, however, such an approach is more aligned with conventions of care in the field of performing arts, as opposed to the visual arts. Within the performing arts these conventions of care, aimed at ensuring the longevity of the work, involve a reliance on embodied knowledge and the building of an oral history rather than with object-centric notions in the visual arts. Traditional theories of visual arts conservation, as touched upon previously, instead emphasize the need to preserve an artwork's material integrity. It is only more recently that scholars and practitioners have argued for the inclusion of oral histories from a variety of stakeholders to ensure the longevity of a visual artwork via documentation methods.[29] In keeping with conventions of care in the field of performing arts, the Walker's approach to *Scaffold Room* appears to be prioritizing the "repertoire of embodied memory" over the written archive.[30]

And more so than the Sehgal piece acquired by the Walker, *Scaffold Room* defies this notion of ownership due to the entanglement of performer and artwork, perhaps even more so than artist and artwork. As Ryan argues, *Scaffold Room* is "uniquely inoculated against proprietorial thinking" due to the integral roles of performers Okpokwasili and Matthis.[31] For Ryan, what makes *Scaffold Room* distinct from other live works acquired by institutions is "the way it is irrevocably fused to the subjectivities of its performers."[32] Part of what has made collecting the "live" possible in recent years is the shift among artists towards what Claire Bishop termed "delegated performances," whereby works are sold in the form of a concept or score.[33] And yet unlike a delegated performance which could technically exist and be performed independently of the artist and original performers with the museum assuming the role of facilitator, *Scaffold Room* is inescapably interlinked with the personas of Okpokwasili and Matthis.

The Walker's acquisition approach thus poses a number of challenging questions that the remainder of this chapter will address: How can a work live

on in the institution's collection without any physical components? And how does an institution that is structured and operates around acquiring the physical proceed with preserving a "map of memories"?

Since the birth of museums, the mission, language and practices of these institutions has traditionally revolved around the object.[34] They are places focused on the collection, display and study of objects, and thus are heavily attached to the material.[35] Even the language of acquisition is heavily biased towards the collection of objects, "things you can tag, box up, and keep in storage until such time as they're brought out and installed for display, good as new and virtually unchanged."[36] The custom within conservation theory and practice of referring to the "objects of conservation"[37] further perpetuates this object paradigm of the museum and museum conservation departments still tend to consist of professionals trained in specific object specialisms such as paper, paintings or textiles.

This paradigm is confronted by the increasing number of live works entering museum collections. A performance has very different needs from a traditional art object: they cannot be left in storage but rather depend on a regular cycle of display to ensure that the knowledge necessary for re-performance is regularly refreshed.[38] And yet these needs can be easily overlooked in an institutional setting. As curator Catherine Wood has repeatedly stated, it can be a challenge to respond to the needs of such works in an institution that has developed around the preservation of objects.[39] Discussing the framework of the Tate, Wood describes how "every kind of behavioral procedure here—and this is something I've worked against for a decade—is about caring for objects, protecting objects, moving objects, the lifts, the barriers, the walls, the guards—it's all about this absolute reverence where the human choreography is deferential to the object."[40] According to Wood, the museum's

> rituals, patterns and indeed an entire sedimentation of behavior (handling objects, placing objects, preserving objects, guarding objects and looking at objects), dominate the potential positions taken by employees and visitors within the museum's choreography—a highly formalized pattern of routines around the things in its care.[41]

Thus, there remains a tendency to "camouflage" works of performance-based art in object-form in order for them to be acquired by museum collections, "as though somehow 'in drag.'"[42] Despite the Walker's experience with Lemon's works, it appears that it likewise might not have been entirely clear as to how *Scaffold Room* would join the collection.[43]

The decision to acquire *Scaffold Room* evolved from what was initially a written correspondence between Ralph Lemon and curator Philip Bither. As Bither described it,

the last time we did a project he started talking about really wanting to assertively change the nature of how his work lived and what it, where it would be accepted, or how he could gain more independence around his practice, and not be so dependent on institutions.[44]

In the letter that Bither received, as he later recalled, Lemon asked:

If I'm going to build my own sort of space, a scaffold structure that could be placed in parks, or community centers, or art centers, or wherever I so choose it has the best framing, then why do I really need the Walker anymore? What is it that you have to offer that I feel I need, or how can you serve me?[45]

For Bither, this provocation from Lemon was an opportunity to reconsider the role of the institution:

We were drawn to *Scaffold Room* not just because it is the next leg of a fascinating 18-year institution-artist relationship, but because it forces us to question in real time issues that Walker leadership and curators often discuss but don't put to the test enough: Can the lines between visual art and dance and performance be transgressed in new, deeper ways? What does it mean to be truly interdisciplinary vs. multidisciplinary? How do we value a creative work, even when no physical object remains? Can memories be "collected"? Can we collect something, but not possess it?[46]

While the acquisition was initially instigated by the Walker's performing arts department, the visual arts department were later brought in, reflecting the boundary crossing nature of the work itself. The idea was that the institution would claim no ownership over the physical production of the work however it was unclear how this would work in practice. The initial aim was that interviews with those who experienced the work during its presentation at the Walker would be incorporated into a document outlining the performance, a kind of "score" which would then be returned to and added to at various points in time. According to Bither, an early idea was to return to some of those interviewed, three years, five years and ten years later, and "see what was still left… almost like a memory exercise."[47] In this way staff at the Walker envisioned that the work would live on in some form. Bither contended: "What's beautiful about that idea to me is as these rememberers are remembering, the oral histories can continue to morph and change … The ephemerality of the piece can continue to be alive."[48]

Bither's words suggest that the acquisition of *Scaffold* Room involved the creation of a vast, continuously evolving archive. Yet in truth, this wasn't fully achieved. By the time of my visit to the Walker, I had seen the inclusion of the audience mentioned several times, both in interviews and recorded gallery talks, and yet on visiting the Walker archives I was surprised to find only a small, relatively thin file. Where was this large score, involving hundreds of hours of

photo and video footage, the range of written materials, the source material and extensive interviews with all those who experienced the work? While I was able to watch a full video recording of the live work and see numerous photographs and digital press clippings, the Head of Archives expressed surprise when I inquired about the whereabouts of the interviews I had seen mentioned, replying that she had never heard of any interviews with onlookers or staff members during the showing of *Scaffold Room*. I was able to access conventional photo and video footage, but this did not amount to the imagined "map of memories" or a comprehensive score. The archivist later tracked down raw footage taken by the Walker's videographer and shared it with me with the caveat that the footage was "very casual" and focused not on recording *Scaffold Room*, but rather on asking the interviewees of their opinion on installation projects *like Scaffold Room*. The provided videos consisted of about eight hours of conversations between the former visual arts curator at the Walker and a selection of interviewees including external curators, authors, art critics and performers,[49] but no general audience members, guards, or technicians.

My own conversations with staff members confirmed my sense that the Walker's ambitious plans for documenting this work had not been fully carried out; Bither himself professed that the acquisition did not achieve everything he had hoped for, but still held many positive aspects for both the Walker and the artist. It is not uncommon that an acquisition plan or documentation strategy relating to the inclusion of audience members doesn't come to fruition. While many scholars and practitioners have pointed to the usefulness of documenting audience experiences, it is rare that such methods are undertaken in practice in busy institutions. So, what prevented the plans for *Scaffold Room* from reaching their full potential in the case of the Walker?

It seemed to me that the issues stemmed from a disconnect between the conventions of different departments within the center that was in turn derived from the embeddedness of differing infrastructures. This will become clear with reference to infrastructure theory originating in the field of sociology.

Master narratives

In her seminal 1999 article "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," sociologist Susan Leigh Star describes the necessity of turning our attention to what she calls "the boring things."[50] What might at first glance appear to be "boring" can in fact be hugely instructive. Star gives the example of an ethnographic reading of what one might consider to be an uninteresting document: a phone book—a thin volume would indicate a rural area, while "those that list only husband's names for married couples indicate a heterosexually-biased sexist society."[51]

According to Star, the ecology of, say, a workplace, home, or school "is profoundly impacted by the relatively unstudied infrastructure that permeates all its functions."[52] Just as with any other workplace, the museum includes often overlooked systems and structures that are, in Star's words, "by definition invisible, part of the background for other kinds of work."[53] It is important to

foreground these backstage elements of work practice by looking at the technologies and arrangements of the museum, which are often so standardized or customary as to go unnoticed. Examples of such backstage elements thus include the collection and registration technologies that support the acquisition process or else the organizational arrangements of the institution.

This call to study the invisible infrastructure is particularly beneficial in relation to the study of performance-based works for its ability to highlight the situations in which certain people or things (or artworks in this case) are not served by a particular infrastructure. As Star describes,

> for a railroad engineer, the rails are not infrastructure but topic. For the person in a wheelchair, the stairs and doorjamb in front of a building are not seamless subtenders of use, but barriers. One person's infrastructure is another's topic, or difficulty.[54]

The same is arguably true for many performance artworks. Much of the infrastructure that has been established for and works so well for object-like artworks acts more as a barrier than a facilitator in the context of performance works. Because museums' infrastructures are not well suited to performance artworks, they risk losing the ability to preserve these works or the ability to display them in the future.

Star discusses the significance of identifying the "master narrative" encoded in the infrastructure of a place. The master narrative is a "single voice that does not problematize diversity" and which "speaks unconsciously from the presumed center of things."[55] To explain how such a narrative could be encoded into the infrastructure, Star gives the example of

> a medical history form for women that encodes monogamous traditional heterosexuality as the only class of responses: blanks for "maiden name" and "husband's name," blanks for "form of birth control," but none for other sexual practices that may have medical consequences, and no place at all for partners other than husband to be called in a medical emergency.[56]

Within a traditional museum, the master narrative tends to be centered on the exhibition and care of object-based artworks and thus the infrastructure of the museum (as opposed to that of a performing arts or dance organization) has a tendency to neglect the needs of "others," such as live artworks. As Star points out, infrastructure is highly embedded, so it is "sunk into and inside of other structures, social arrangements and technologies."[57] It is far reaching and is "learned as part of membership" by those working in the museum. Thus, conventions of practice within the museum, in this case relating to the care and treatment of artworks, are inextricably linked with the master narrative that dictates the infrastructure. According to this narrative, to care for an artwork is to store it as a means of protecting it from loss or damage. A different approach is needed for live artworks, as described previously. Yet an approach that

would take into account the needs of live artworks would clash with the embodied standards, the learned behaviors and conventions of practice that are tied up with the infrastructure of the museum.

While the Walker's collection includes much performance-related ephemera, the "experimental acquisition" of *Scaffold Room* was its first real attempt to instigate a new strategy of acquisition for performance. As indicated before, the Walker is atypical in its evolution as an institution, having provided a prominent space for the performing arts from as early as the 1960s. In this way it differs from a traditional museum with the single master narrative that "others" performance. Instead, it appeared that the different departments, visual arts and performing arts, each had deeply embedded narratives of their own.

In my view, this artwork and the plans for its longevity fell in the space between two master narratives and as a result was somewhat overlooked by both. The values and standards embedded in the infrastructure of the visual arts department at the Walker were premised on the notion of the art "object" and the idea of collecting, displaying and caring for something tangible, whereas the practices, priorities and expertise of the performing arts department were developed and structured around commissioning and production, with little thought given to what an acquisition process might conventionally entail. And while this is to be expected, it appears that in completing this acquisition there was a disconnect between the departments and a lack of clear communication.

Multiple frameworks, multiple practices

In discussing performance art, performance scholars Cláudia Madeira, Daniela Salazar and Hélia Marçal describe how "practices of preservation are (also) bounded by specific disciplinary borders and procedures that do not resonate with the variability and variety of this artistic genre."[58] This was the case in the acquisition of *Scaffold Room* as both the visual arts departments and the performing arts departments approached the acquisition from a specific context of ingrained outlooks and procedures.

Almost all the staff members I spoke to at the Walker had a different conception of what the acquisition experiment was and to what extent it was successful. Many seemed to be under the impression that a great deal more interviews had been completed, with a wider variety of discussants, than are in evidence.

Interviews revealed conflicting motivations and priorities between the visual and the performing arts departments, but also a fear of what might be lost in blurring the boundaries between these two disciplines. For staff in the performing arts department, the acquisition process was intended to explore the ways in which the Walker could collect performance-based work without owning or controlling it. There was a particular insistence that the acquisition would not limit future iterations of the work, in terms of who could experience it or where it could be presented. According to Bither:

> We weren't editioning it out in any way. We were just saying we are acquiring the Minneapolis experience of *Scaffold Room*—we are not saying you can't sell this to anyone else… The ownership over the whole piece is retained with the artist. We did not want to claim ownership over those ideas, it's like a conceptual piece, a conceptual acquisition almost.[59]

The visual arts department, on the other hand, seemed far more engaged with considering the work in its future form and the role of documentation and were concerned that the performing arts department might not undertake the necessary processes required to complete an acquisition and ensure proper stewardship, despite not being entirely clear on what this would entail in this case.

According to Walker Curator of Visual Arts Pavel Pyś, collection care responsibilities at the Walker are typically divided between curators and Joseph King, who oversees registration and care. While some conservation is carried out internally, it is largely outsourced to the Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC). In the view of Joseph King, then Registrar and current Director of Collections and Exhibition Management, the *Scaffold Room* acquisition was yet to reach its full potential in 2019:

> You know, what we acquired out of that [*Scaffold Room*], was just basic video documentation, of the entire thing. So that is what we own. And there really is not at this point anything more to it. It is basically just a hard drive of footage, unedited, at this moment. And our hope was that in working with [Lemon]—we have a pretty strong working relationship with Ralph, you know, that spans decades… that he would use that to create something else.[60]

From King's standpoint the responsibility for the evolution of the acquisition lay with the artist. When asked, King suggested that the "something else" might have ended up being some form of video-based documentation, but it didn't seem that there was any real blueprint in mind.[61] The idea of an acquisition process being led by the artist is unusual—one would expect the process to be dictated by institutional regulations and procedures and yet in this case there is no precedent to rely upon.

Nevertheless, it appeared that a greater issue in the acquisition process stemmed from miscommunications between departments with entrenched working practices. Describing how he felt that the acquisition failed to achieve its aims, Bither stated:

> I didn't know what I didn't know… the way responsibilities were separated for the project, it was strictly the Visual Art department that was to work with registration but I think it would have been useful if I personally had sat down with Joe [King] and learned more about the process of collection acquisition… It wasn't until three years later when he said "yeah, we didn't really understand what that project was…" So, I think they may have thought

it was an end-around [a type of trick play in American football] and actually it was sheer ignorance within Performing Arts...[62]

The "sheer ignorance" referred to by Bither is a lack of knowledge concerning conventional acquisition and conservation procedures developed by the visual arts department, having not attempted a live performance acquisition previously.[63] Although the performing arts department conceded that they did not undertake the appropriate due diligence, such as by collaborating with the registrars, and were hindered by the infrastructural conventions of their department, they likewise expressed doubt that the registration or visual arts departments would know how to handle the work: "I got a sense that there was a bit of nervousness, because it was so radical. In the Visual Art side of things."[64] What's more, members of the performing arts department expressed surprise at not being invited for an interview as part of the score or so-called "map of memories." As Bither said, "I think [the registrar] may not have even known what to do with the work, because by its nature it wasn't something that can be entirely preserved ... it wasn't something physical." He mused, "How would you, as a registrar, take care of people's memories?"[65]

Registrar King, in turn, commented on the struggle of dealing with these kinds of works, describing it as "challenging for museum standards in that we are object-based."[66] He went on to say the acquisition of these challenging works has prompted the recognition that the Walker's "documentation standards have needed to change."[67] Such changes were already to be realized in the coming months: curator Pyś mentioned that, in collaboration with King, they were in the process of drafting a new Collections Care and Management Plan, "which will speak to care across all Walker collections."[68] The implication was that the new plan would be more inclusive of such new, challenging additions to the collection.

A recurring theme in the case of *Scaffold Room* was that, in the words of one curator, "the reality of the constant pressures of an institution" meant that the "bigger picture dream" was not feasible. The workflows and institutional priorities of the Walker hindered the establishment of a "map of memories," let alone plans to return to it every few months or years and added to as had originally been planned. This is not unusual in art institutions, but it is a particular issue when it comes to performance art in institutions because of the mismatch between these workflows and the needs of live artworks. As discussed previously, a performance cannot just be placed in storage and returned to at a later point but rather is reliant on a regular cycle of display in addition to its production needs.[69] With this particular acquisition conception, such a cycle might instead involve a refreshing of memories in relation to the particular iteration of the Walker *Scaffold Room*, similar to the "re-fresh meeting" instigated by Tate as a method of preservation for one of Tino Sehgal's works.[70]

Just as significant however with *Scaffold Room* was the departmental setup and organization. The division of disciplines contributed to a lack of expertise sharing which ultimately impacted the stewardship plans for *Scaffold Room*.

The work involved in putting the plan into place did not neatly fall under one staff member's or department's responsibilities and was thus susceptible to being forgotten or deferred in the museum's day-to-day work. Likewise, it was only with later reflection that there seemed to be a real appreciation of the value of encouraging dialogue between the departments and sharing expertise. For example, Bither stated that it wasn't until a few months prior to my visit that he realized it would have been beneficial to work more closely with the registrar in the process of acquiring *Scaffold Room*. In his view, he wasn't experienced enough in the artwork acquisition process, because this was typically always handled by visual art curators, to know to proceed through the "formal channels," for instance by collaborating with the registration department or the archives.[71] It was only in the aftermath of the process that he realized there was "a very systematic way, for when a work is acquired."[72] In my view, both the workflows of the museum and the lack of interdepartmental collaboration acted as infrastructural barriers to the strategy for the acquisition of *Scaffold Room* reaching its full potential. And yet, each individual I spoke to felt that the Walker had learned valuable lessons about the acquisition of performance from the Lemon acquisition and it appeared to provoke multiple changes in the working practices of the institution.

Lessons learned and evolving institutional practice

In particular, Walker staff members were keen to discuss the more recent acquisition of another performance-based work, *STAGING: solo* by artist and choreographer Maria Hassabi (b. 1973) and the ways in which it built on the experiences of acquiring *Scaffold Room*. Hassabi's work is the third live work to enter the Walker's permanent collection, following the acquisitions of the works by Tino Sehgal and Ralph Lemon, and the first of Hassabi's works to enter a museum collection. Staff that I spoke to were keen to frame this recent acquisition as a real expansion of collection practices, as well as a demonstration of the way in which staff members had evolved their thinking in response to their acquisition of Lemon's work.

In order to facilitate the Hassabi and future acquisitions, the Walker established a working group involving members of both the performing and the visual arts departments who meet on a regular basis in order to further interdisciplinary projects and with a focus on enhanced documentation. According to a Curatorial Assistant of the performing arts department, these individuals, who meet every other week,

> …are really trying to be deliberate about how we are thinking about documentation, and what it is – how does it affect the archives, and the ephemeral nature of the work. And how do we conserve *that*. Like in new and thoughtful ways. And the same goes for the publishing, it's trying to reconcile maybe how performance art has not necessarily had the same kind of scholarship around it.[73]

Visual arts curator Pyś described the decision-making process leading to the Hassabi's acquisition as a reasonably prolonged affair. The work was originally commissioned by the Walker and put on display alongside the Merce Cunningham exhibition *Common Time*, after which a solo version of the work was presented in the galleries. This display sparked a dialogue among curators from both visual arts and performing arts and the artist herself, in which they began to consider the potential of acquiring something by Hassabi. In Pyś's words they were "quite conservative" at first:

> There was a set of lights, there was a carpet, there was the live dance… and we were only thinking about the tangible, "real things," and then we realized, well the work is—the most important aspect of the work is—the piece of dance. And so, we started engaging with Maria, and talking that through, and we spent sixteen months working back and forth on the acquisition agreement, which is about twenty pages long, and it outlines exactly the process for how the work could be presented.[74]

This description reveals the immediate response on behalf of the art institution to conceptualize the collecting of a live work along the same lines as a more traditional acquisition, focusing on the material aspects. This is despite the fact that these discussions included a staff member from the performing arts department who had previously been involved in the Walker's other "object-less" acquisition, *Scaffold Room*. It took time to reflect and work collaboratively with the artist to come to an agreement concerning future presentations of the work. In contrast to the acquisition of *Scaffold Room*, where the ideas for the acquisition and what it might look like evolved throughout the process, with the Hassabi acquisition staff members realized the necessity of working out a plan of stewardship "really from the beginning to end."[75]

Ultimately, the Walker acquired a piece of dance, which also has the potential to be presented in an "archival version" or a "sculptural version." The Walker acquired the right to present the dance, but also the right to present what they termed an "archival version," which includes a pink vinyl line on the floor, a costume on a mannequin and a short video depicting the piece. The sculptural version consists of paper stacks—identical paper sheets—on which is an excerpt from the score, accompanied by the pink line on the floor. The curator described this sculptural version as similar to a work by Felix González-Torres, in that visitors are invited to take a piece of paper from the stacks. Each of these versions can be shown individually or alongside the choreographed live showing.

Having learned from the *Scaffold Room* acquisition, staff were determined to dedicate more discussions to the longevity of this new acquisition. The need for multi-disciplinary collaboration was respected from the beginning as was a need to plan rigorously from start to finish in order to ensure the work's future sustainability. As Bither described:

> I think we get concerned about artists who have developed rigorous, distinctive movement vocabularies or systems—what happens when they [performance artists] are no longer performing or dancers they personally have trained are no longer available? We've solved that with Maria's piece.[76]

King also made it clear that a lot of work had gone into the creation of an acquisition and conservation model which would ensure the work can live on in the museum. In his words:

> We had to work with her to get it to a point where we think it is sustainable. Within a set parameter… To make it something that is sustainable within a museum environment. As well as planning for the future. How will dance instructors be trained, how are they deemed worthy, you know, developing that whole structure. So that the performance is actually able to be replicated.[77]

While replication of *Scaffold Room* was not necessarily the goal of its acquisition, the experience of the acquisition demonstrated to staff members the importance of creating space for collaborative conversations, particularly in advance of the acquisition process. As curatorial assistant Molly Hanse stated, staff members gained an understanding of "who needs to be at the table, and when."[78] Ultimately these recent acquisitions of performance-based works have allowed staff at the Walker to explore the unusual needs that performance demands and evolve their working practices to cater for them more effectively.

Conclusion

Utilizing infrastructure theory derived from STS, this chapter has demonstrated how a lack of interdepartmental collaboration can act as an infrastructural barrier in acquisition and care strategies reaching their full potential. The embeddedness of conventions and differing working practices can result in miscommunications and a lack of effective future planning for more complex artworks and acquisitions.

Despite having a strong performance department and an esteemed history of commissioning and showing performance art and collecting ephemera, not all the problems of collecting performance art were solved at the Walker. It is clear that there is now a dedicated effort among staff at the Walker to strive for more interdepartmental and interdisciplinary collaboration. The lessons learned at the Walker regarding performance acquisitions are also a key demonstration of the need for interdepartmental collaboration to occur in a *formalized manner*. As such, it allows for regular expertise sharing and encourages an ongoing dialogue between departments.

The case of the *Scaffold Room* acquisition provides a novel example of an approach to the institutional collecting of performance art that prioritizes oral

histories and memory gathering over traditional methods of conservation and collection (the preservation of objecthood). The process of acquisition reveals the institutional barriers that live works encounter due to long-standing conventions of practice. Such "experimental acquisitions" are integral to bringing such understandings to the fore and allowing the development of practices that accommodate the inclusion of such "challenging" works within the art institution.

Notes

1 "Walker Art Center, Minneapolis: Philip Bither, William and Nadine McGuire Director and Senior Curator, Performing Arts; Eric Crosby, Associate Curator, Visual Arts; Robin Dowden, Director, New Media Initiatives; and Fionn Meade, Artistic Director, in conversation with Jonah Westerman, April 2015," in *Histories of Performance Documentation*, ed. Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 55-56; Hilarie M. Sheets, "When the Art Isn't On the Walls: Dance Finds a Home in Museums," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2015.

2 Early examples of which include the acquisition of works by Tino Sehgal by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 2005 and, in the same year, the acquisition of both a work by Sehgal and another by Roman Ondák by the Tate Modern, London.

3 Pip Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations," *Tate Papers*, no. 6, (2006), accessed December 10, 2022, www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/06/authenticity-change-and-loss-conservation-of-time-based-media-installations.

4 See Hanna B. Hölling, "The Technique of Conservation: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 2 (2017): 87–96; Erma Hermens and Frances Robertson eds., *Authenticity in Transition. Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation*, Proceedings of the International Conference held at the University of Glasgow, December 1–2, 2014 (London: Archetype Publications, 2016); Lúcia Almeido Matos, Gunnar Heydenreich and Rita Macedo, eds., special issue Performing Documentation in Contemporary Art, *Revista de História da Arte,* no. 4 (2015); Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton, eds., *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011); Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker, eds., *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas, and Uncomfortable Truths* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009).

5 For more information see Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Oxford: Routledge, 1993); Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997): 11–18; Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present:' Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence," *TDR: The Drama Review* 55, no. 1 (2011): 16–45; Philip Auslander, *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996); Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *A Journal of Performance and Art (PAJ)* 84 (2006): 1–10; and more recently Louis van den Hengel, "Archives of Affect: Performance, Reenactment and the Becoming of Memory," in *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, ed. Laszlo Muntean, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (London: Routledge, 2017), 125–141.

6 Ralph Lemon, "The Evolution of a Para-Theater and Audience," Vimeo video, *6:06*, posted by MAPP International Productions as "Ralph Lemon Scaffold Room 2012," 2012, https://vimeo.com/58399922.

7 Bartholomew Ryan, "Sacred Spaces: Ralph Lemon, Okwui Okpokwasili, and April Matthis Discuss *Scaffold Room*," *Sightlines*, Walker Art Center, September 22, 2014, n.p.

8   Edna Carter was the wife of Walter Carter (now deceased), a former sharecropper born in 1908 from Mississippi, and long-time muse of Ralph Lemon. Videos of the Carters feature in many of Lemon's works.

9   Jenn Joy, "Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room*," *BOMB Magazine* 130 (Winter 2015).

10 Phelan, *Unmarked*, 146.

11 Auslander, *Liveness* and "The Performativity of Performance Documentation."

12 "Performing Arts," The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, website https://walkerart.org/about/performing-arts, accessed October 29, 2021.

13 Examples include the extensions and redevelopments at the Whitney (2015); at the Tate (2016); and MoMA, New York (2016).

14 "Performing Arts," The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, website https://walkerart.org/about/performing-arts, accessed October 29, 2021.

15 "Performing Arts," The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, website https://walkerart.org/about/performing-arts, accessed November 29, 2021.

16 "Performing Arts," The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, website https://walkerart.org/about/performing-arts, accessed November 29, 2021.

17 The Merce Cunningham collection at the Walker consists of 4,300 costumes, décor, posters, photographs, and sketches representing 150 of Cunningham's choreographic works.

18 These include *Geography* (The Geography Trilogy: Part 1) (1997), *Tree* (The Geography Trilogy: Part 2) (2000)*; Come home Charley Patton* (The Geography Trilogy: Part 3) (2004); *(The efflorescence of) Walter* as part of *OPEN-ENDED* (the art of engagement) exhibition (2007); *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* (2010) and *Meditation* (2012) (with Jim Findlay).

19 Katherine Profeta, "The Geography Trilogy," in *Ralph Lemon*, ed. Thomas J. Lax and David Velasco (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 101.

20 *Geography* (1997); *Tree* (2000); and *Come Home Charley Patton* (2004).

21 See "List of Works," compiled by Danielle Jackson, in *Ralph Lemon*, ed. Thomas J. Lax and David Velasco. *Modern Dance* series (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 154–159.

22 It is also worth noting that the acquisition of Sehgal's work may well have been less problematic due to the already existing standards for the acquisition and ongoing maintenance of Sehgal's works, having been acquired by multiple museums around the world. Museums owning a Sehgal work in their collection include the Stedelijk, Tate, Van Abbe, MoMA, New York, San Francisco MOMA, Serralves, the Guggenheim, Fondation Beyeler, and the Hirshhorn Museum. There is also extensive literature pertaining to the acquisition of Sehgal's works: see Vivian van Saaze, "In the Absence of Documentation: Remembering Tino Sehgal's Constructed Situations," *Revista de História da Arte*, 55–63.

23 "Walker Art Center, Minneapolis," 55.

24 "Walker Art Center, Minneapolis," 55.

25 "Walker Art Center, Minneapolis," 56.

26 Bartholomew Ryan, "Radical Dispossession: Ralph Lemon's *Scaffold Room*," in *Ralph Lemon*, ed. Thomas J. Lax and David Velasco (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 141.

27 Doryun Chong, "Fugitive Value: Ralph Lemon and Museums," in *Ralph Lemon*, ed. Thomas J. Lax and David Velasco (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 129.

28 Ralph Lemon, "I'd Rather Talk about the Post-Part," in *On Value*, ed. Triple Canopy and Ralph Lemon (New York: Triple Canopy, 2015), 16.

29 See Caitlin Jones and Lizzie Muller, "Between Real and Ideal: Documenting Media Art," *Leonardo* 41 no. 4 (2008): 418-419. See also Heike Roms and Rebecca Edwards, "Oral History as Site-Specific Practice: Locating the History of Performance Art in Wales," in *Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History*, ed. Shelley Tower (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 171–191.

30 See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

31 Ryan, "Radical Dispossession," 141.

32 Ryan, "Radical Dispossession," 141.

33 Claire Bishop, "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity," *October Magazine* 140 (Spring 2012). Bishop describes "delegated performances" as "the act of hiring nonprofessionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time and a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following his or her instructions," 91.

34 See Hanna B. Hölling, "Keeping Time: On Museum, Temporality and Heterotopia," *ArtMatters International Journal for Technical Art History* – Special Issue #1 (2021); Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994); Ludmilla Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums," in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 22–40.

35 Pip Laurenson and Vivian van Saaze, "Collecting Performance-Based Art: New Challenges and Shifting Perspectives," in *Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters*, ed. Outi Remes, Laura MacCulloch and Marika Leino (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 28.

36 Susannah Schouweiler, "Cataloguing performance: How to catch lighting in a bottle," *Walker Art Magazine*, November 3, 2011, n.p.

37 See Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss;" Salvador Muńoz Vinas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (London: Routledge, 2005); Chris Caple, *Conservation Skills: Judgement, Method and Decision Making* (London: Routledge, 2000).

38 Laurenson and van Saaze, "Collecting Performance-Based Art," 36–37.

39 Catherine Wood, "In Advance of the Broken Arm: Collecting Live Art and the Museum's Changing Game," in *Live Forever: Collecting Live Art*, ed. Teresa Calonje (Köln: Koenig Books, 2014).

40 Catherine Wood, "In Conversation with Sara Wookey," in *Who Cares? Dance in the Gallery and Museum*, ed. Sara Wookey (London: Siobhan Davies Dance, 2015), 27.

41 Wood, "In Advance of the Broken Arm," 124.

42 Wood, "In Advance of the Broken Arm," 125.

43 Empirical research was undertaken in 2019 and consisted of numerous in-person interviews with staff members, including Walker Art Center curators, administrators, registrars, and archivists in addition to archival research.

44 Philip Bither, interview with the author, January 24, 2019.

45 Lemon's question as repeated in Bither's own words. Philip Bither, interview with the author.

46 Personal correspondence between Bither and the artist (2014), as published in Philip Bither, "Rethinking the Role of Institutions and Curators in a New Interdisciplinary Age," in *Curating Live Arts*, ed. Dena Davida et al. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 316.

47 Philip Bither, interview with the author.

48 Philip Bither, as quoted in Sheets, "When the Art Isn't on the Walls," n.p.

49 The full list of interviewees consisted of Yesomi Umolu, previously a Curatorial Fellow for Visual Arts at the Walker and now a curator based in Chicago; Thomas Lax, Curator of Performance and Media Art at MoMA; Ana Janevski, Associate Curator in the Department of Media and Performance Art at MoMA; Ananya Chatterjea, a contemporary Indian dancer and scholar; Gabrielle Civil, an American performance artist, poet, and educator; Jenn Joy, art critic and author; and Claudia La Rocco, a poet, critic and performer.

50 Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioural Scientist* 32, no. 3 (November/December 1999): 377.
51 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 378.
52 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 379.
53 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 380.
54 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 380.
55 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 384.
56 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 384.
57 Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 381.
58 Cláudia Madeira, Daniela Salazar and Hélia Marçal, "Performance Art Temporalities: Relationships between Museum, University, and Theatre," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 33, no. 1 (2018): 80.
59 Philip Bither, interview with the author.
60 Joseph King, interview with the author, January 24, 2019.
61 Joseph King, interview with the author.
62 Philip Bither, interview with the author.
63 The Tino Sehgal acquisition was led by the Visual Arts Department.
64 Philip Bither, interview with the author.
65 Philip Bither, interview with the author.
66 Joseph King, interview with the author.
67 Joseph King, interview with the author.
68 Pavel Pyś, email correspondence with the author, April 27, 2019.
69 Laurenson and van Saaze, "Collecting Performance-Based Art," 36–37.
70 See van Saaze, "In the Absence of Documentation," 61.
71 Philip Bither, interview with the author.
72 Philip Bither, interview with the author.
73 Molly Hanse, interview with the author, January 24, 2019.
74 Pavel Pyś, interview with the author, January 23, 2019.
75 Pavel Pyś, interview with the author.
76 Philip Bither, interview with the author.
77 Joseph King, interview with the author.
78 Molly Hanse, interview with the author.

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7 In the shadow of the state

Collecting performance at IMMA and institutions of care in the Irish context

Brian Castriota and Claire Walsh

Introduction

It is a recurring theme in conservation and museological discourses of recent years that the evolving and rhizomatic authorships, anatomies and materialities of many contemporary artworks have instigated shifts in thinking and approach around institutional ownership and care. In this essay we examine ideas of collecting and care in relation to a body of performance-based artworks that have recently entered the collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). We focus on *The Touching Contract* (2016), a collaborative work by artists Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones that confronts the state's power over women's bodies. As part of the wider project *In the Shadow of the State* by Browne and Jones, *The Touching Contract*—co-commissioned by ArtAngel in the UK and Create in Ireland—unfolded throughout 2016 across Ireland and the UK.[1] In what follows, we situate the acquisition process for this work within the context of museological collecting institutions' origins as apparatuses of colonialism and empire building, the contentious legacy of institutions of care in Ireland, and IMMA as a national institution founded within Ireland's post-colonial context.

The Touching Contract entered the IMMA collection in parallel to the development of IMMA's acquisition policy and processes around collecting artworks involving live performance. As a work with its own internal ethics of care, *The Touching Contract* required us to approach its acquisition in a way that was both sensitive and responsive to its social and political specificities, and engaged with the principles of the collaborative methodology and feminist ethos in which the work was made. In this chapter we discuss how the acquisition of *The Touching Contract* (Figure 7.1) contributed to an institutional shift in how ownership and care of artworks is conceived, and how it pushed us to devise and implement new approaches to musealization, conservation and institutional care reflective of the collective authorship and ownership that are intrinsic to this work.

Musealization and imperialism

Many of the prevailing protocols and procedures around acquisition, ownership and care in place at collecting institutions around the world have deep and

Figure 7.1 The Touching Contract, Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 2016. Staged perfor-
mance documentation at the Pillar Rooms, Dublin, 2016. Photograph:
Miriam O'Connor. Performer: Deirdre Murphy.

inextricable roots in the museum's history as an apparatus of European
colonialism and empire building. In *Potential History: Unlearning Imperial-
ism* (2019), Ariella Aïsha Azoulay positions institutional archival practices as
both products and agents of imperialism and colonialism, recognizing how
museums and collecting institutions were conceived to house and display the
spoils of European war and extraction, and further reify the cultural hege-
mony of colonial powers.[2] Often invoked as one of the primary values
driving practices of conservation in institutional settings in the Global
North, Azoulay describes the emergence of "historical value" in the nine-
teenth and twentieth century as "a major excuse for the accumulation of
others' worlds, which is materialized in the archive as institution," and
which, she argues, must be understood as an effect of the "archival regime":

> Portions of people's living worlds were declared valuable pieces of history
> and could be appropriated, owned, processed, sealed under a particular
> meaning, and placed alongside other chunks in a way that "owning his-
> tory" became the source of authorization for owning more.[3]

In their collection of "others' worlds"—thereby severing objects from the indi-
viduals and communities who used and created them—imperial institutions
"seek to impose their own principles and structures as the foundation of

transcendental forms that have no history other than their concrete instantia-
tions."[4] The distinction between the art object and archival document, Azoulay
asserts, is also an effect of these practices:

> The meticulous archival documentation of art objects within museums
> is not operated with an eye to transforming them into archival records;
> on the contrary, it is operated in order to reinstitute the imperial dif-
> ference between document and object, to assert the undeniable weight of
> archival documents in writing history, and to ground the status of
> archival procedures as neutral and external to the production of objects
> as art.[5]

The practices at work inside contemporary archives, museums and other col-
lecting institutions—having been founded on an imperialist-colonialist model of
extraction—in many ways perpetuate what Azoulay describes as acts of *viola-
tion*, understood as the "constitutive irreverence and disrespect of imperialist
institutions towards what exists, toward that which it shreds through endless
devices into collectable pieces that can be processed through further devices."[6]
The musealization of complex contemporary artworks, including those that
involve live performance, frequently entails processes of transfiguration—a
"rewriting"[7] where uncertainty is often seen as a vice, "blurry"[8] object bound-
aries become forcibly streamlined, and efforts are directed towards reducing
artworks to coherent, complete and repeatable collection objects that can be
perpetuated indefinitely in the absence of their original creators. While the
intentions of conservators and collection caretakers to understand from artists
how their works should be materialized, activated and perpetuated are generally
motivated by a respect or even reverence for artworks—and their perceived
"integrity"—the operational patterns and infrastructure of care at work in
many collecting institutions nevertheless reenact and perpetuate the kinds of
violation that Azoulay describes. We see traces of this in paperwork where the
materials provided to the institution as part of an acquisition agreement—
including video files, display specifications and certificates of authenticity—are
described and thought of principally as commodities received and possessed in
exchange for financial remuneration. It arises in conservators' perpetuation of
a self-image where they are neutral and objective arbiters of what artworks
have been and should be, as well as in their anxieties around a work's
"external dependencies," including the knowledge held by a work's creators
and collaborators, often framed in negative terms of risk to be mitigated. We
see this in a capitalist distribution of resources and labor within many muse-
ums, which prioritizes efficiency above almost everything else, and often
results in the elevation of habitual, procedural practices, template thinking
and one-size-fits all approaches to acquisition. We can also see this at work in
the sharp distinctions that are often drawn between the artwork's constituent
components and "supporting" documentation, as well as the general framing
of an artwork's musealization in terms of possession.

To accept uncritically many of these inherited models and procedures as standard or even "best practice" ignores not only their histories and origins in the twin projects of imperialism and colonialism, but further (re-)enacts a violation of others' worlds. How then might *imperialist-colonialist* models of acquisition, ownership and care be re-conceived to safeguard artworks by fostering rather than severing existing relationships, and without "shredding" the objects we aim to secure a futurity for?

The Touching Contract

> …This is an Artistic Performance. The Performance will be initiated with the sounding of a Triangle. You will be Touched by one or more female Performers, nominated by the Artists. That Touch will be improvised, direct and non-forceful. Performers will exercise their Discretion in deciding how to Touch you. However, the Touch(es) Administered may be experienced as having one or more of the qualities indicated on the wheel opposite…spiritual, maternal, healing, policing, playful, sensual, psychic, self-, sonic, medical, educational, violent, paternal, sexual, contaminating, service-based…[9]

Browne and Jones' *The Touching Contract*, and their wider project *In the Shadow of the State*, brought together a rich multi-disciplinary network of thinkers and imaginers—including experts from law, medicine, material culture and music—to explore ideas of consent, care, the embodied experience of the law and "the ways in which the state speaks to us through its language, architecture and institutions and asks how we might answer back."[10] Some of the main collaborators on the project included academic Máiréad Enright, a specialist in human rights, reproductive justice and contract law; midwife and litigant Philomena Canning; composer Alma Kelliher; and a diverse range of legal academics and activists.

To date there have been two manifestations of *The Touching Contract*—one which took place in The Rotunda—a historic maternity hospital in Dublin—in September 2016, and the other which took place in London—in a former juvenile courthouse—in November of the same year. While both events shared many aspects in common, the contracts employed and the themes explored were specific to each jurisdiction and socio-political context and here we focus on the Dublin version.

The work unfolded in two parts, or acts, beginning with the administration of a contract with the audience, followed by their participation in the performance, which was carried out by a group of women performers.[11] The contract—which formed the basis of how participants chose to engage in the performance—was developed in 2016 with an invited group of around twelve local activist women in Dublin at a legal drafting session prior to the performance. There the group explored how "women encounter the touch of the law every day, with and without consent."[12] The contract comprised a two-page document outlining the types of touch to be expected in the performance and acts as a consent form for participants to sign before they engage (Figures 7.2 and 7.3).[13] A selection of artifacts used in the legal drafting session were presented to audience members in
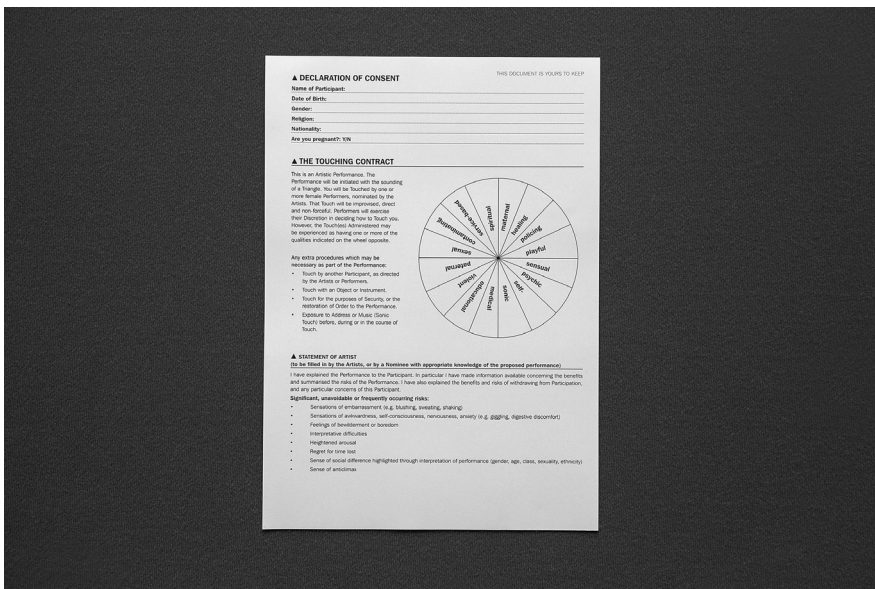
Figure 7.2 The Touching Contract, Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 2016. The contract used in the Dublin version of The Touching Contract. Photograph: Miriam O'Connor.
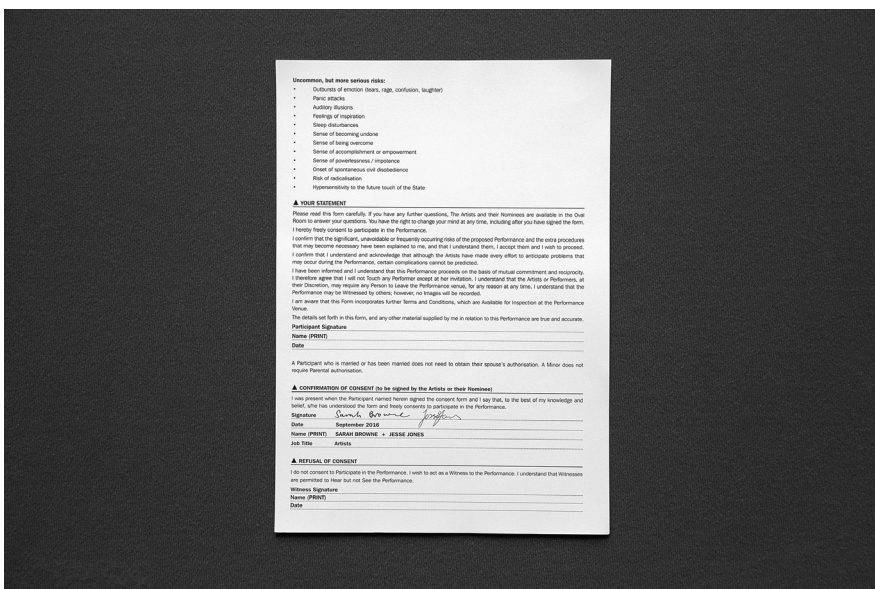

Figure 7.3 The Touching Contract, Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 2016. The contract used in the Dublin version of The Touching Contract. Photograph: Miriam O'Connor.

Figure 7.4 Screenshot of Twitter post from #TheTouchingContract @pparchive dated Sep 25, 2016.

a "pre-performance space." In Dublin, these objects included a metal speculum, a silk scarf, a carton of milk and a packet of rashers or bacon (Figure 7.4). An archive of existing consent forms and State documents compiled by Máiréad Enright was also available in this space (Figure 7.5), and a group of mediators, cast by the artists, were present to assist with the administration and signing of the contract before entering the main performance room.[14]

After the participants signed the contracts they entered the performance space where a background soundtrack by Alma Kelliher was playing. Once the performers (wearing headphones) entered the room, the music changed, this time including samples of pop tunes. A detailed account of the performance is given by Máiréad Enright and writer and academic Tina Kinsella in their paper "Legal Aesthetics in The Touching Contract: Memory, Exposure and Transformation" (2021). In it, they outline five rough phases of the performance:

> The first was a period of examination or inspection – touching and manipulating participants' clothing, bodies and faces…In the second phase, it seemed to become clear that the performers had been looking for the few men among the participants. Six were brought into the centre of the room in a circle. The performers moved them through a series of ritualised positions.[15]

Figure 7.5 The Touching Contract, Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 2016. Archive of State and Non-State Contracting Practices Affecting the Rights of Women in Ireland, compiled by Máiréad Enright and available for reading before and after the performance, with the assistance of mediators if necessary. Photograph: Miriam O'Connor.

They go on to describe scenes reminiscent of contraband communications or "comms" passed between political prisoners in Northern Ireland, with the performers removing small rolled up papers from their mouths and placing these on the men's bodies. The third and fourth phases saw the performers break into "wild, angry or sexualised dancing"[16] before collapsing, tearful and exhausted, willing participants for assistance. Finally, the participants were led into the center of the room, their arms placed on each other's shoulders and knotted together as a group "intertwining the bodies so that they could each feel each other's weight, warmth and discomfort."[17] In another account of the action, participant Anne Mullee recounts that the choreography

> started timidly, with the performers offering participants a listen from their MP3 players (I was given a blast of *Baby it's Cold Outside*), then slowly grew in intensity as they mimed washing and inspecting their hands, framed the cleft between their legs with forefingers and thumbs to make the shape of a triangle, then raised their hands over their faces, snapping their teeth and grimacing. Jamaican pop reggae band Inner Circle's 1992 hit *Sweat (A La La La La Long)* boomed throughout the room.[18]

She goes on to describe the dissipation of intensity—participants being embraced by the performers as they were led out and given over-brewed tea and soggy toast, familiar provisions of care after moments of shock in institutional settings.

In the Shadow of the State was supported by the Irish Arts Council's program as part of the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, a short-lived rebellion against British Rule in Ireland which was a catalyst for the eventual emancipation of part of Ireland from Britain in 1922 and partition of the island into Ireland and Northern Ireland. In the 1916 Proclamation, announcing Ireland's independence from Britain, the revolutionary leaders proposed a new state founded on rights and equality: "The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens…"[19] as well as a commitment to universal suffrage. While voting rights for women followed the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, other legislation swiftly introduced restrictions on divorce, access to contraception, the right to serve on juries, and continuation in employment after marriage.[20] Enright and Kinsella suggest that Browne and Jones's work occupies the tension between the emancipatory declarations of the Irish Free State and the embodied realities of the years that followed. As they write:

> *The Touching Contract* works the emerging tension between the promise of official legal discourse and women's marginalised experience of maternal, obstetric and reproductive violence. It makes space for complex consideration of law's experiential dimension, specifically the transfer of intergenerational trauma that follows such violence.[21]

The Touching Contract engaged with the Easter Rising centenary by pointing to the horrific legacies of institutions of "care" for women in Ireland over the last hundred years. These include the infamous Magdalene Laundries for "fallen women" in which more than 30,000 women were incarcerated from the eighteenth century up until 1996 when the last one closed; and the Mother and Baby Homes, founded in the 1920s, run mostly by Catholic nuns, where unwed women were sent to deliver their babies and where in recent years mass graves as well as evidence of widespread forced adoptions have been uncovered.[22] The last of these closed in 1998. In the recent history of Irish law, marital rape was made illegal as late as 1990, while in 1983, the 8th Amendment was inserted into the constitution making Ireland one of the few countries with a constitutional ban on abortion.

The Touching Contract focused on embodied knowledge and the embodied transmission of knowledge in relation to these histories at a moment of heightened socio-political tensions around women's rights in Ireland. The performance was staged in the Pillar Room at the Rotunda Hospital, the oldest continuously-running maternity hospital in the world (Figure 7.6). It coincided with the weekend of the fifth annual March for Choice in 2016, part of a campaign demanding a referendum on the 8th Amendment. There was a charged atmosphere in Dublin and throughout the country at the time as these demands gained traction and visibility, ultimately leading towards a referendum on the matter in May 2018, which resulted in the removal of the Amendment and the legalization of abortion in Ireland.[23] Rather than

Figure 7.6 The Pillar Room at the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, 2016. Photograph shared
          on Twitter by @pparchive, dated Sep 24, 2016.

documenting or outlining the specifics of these issues, the artists focused instead on
the idea of embodied knowledge—specifically, they note, as a place that stands out-
side of official state classifications and control—and the embodied transmission of
memory. Enright and Kinsella remark that: "setting *The Touching Contract* in this
space at this time both directed participants' attention towards Irish law's revolu-
tionary promises, and away from them, to its actual bodily consequences."[24]

   Ideas and practices of consent are also woven into the artists' approach to
documenting the work and the larger project out of which it grew. Participants
in the legal drafting sessions were given the choice to remain anonymous and,
in place of video or audio recordings, extensive written notes were taken of the
sessions along with courtroom drawings (Figure 7.7). A number of images
illustrating this chapter are by photographer Miriam O'Connor, one of the
project's many collaborators (Figures 7.8–7.10). Browne and Jones took great
care in considering if and how the project would be represented visually. In an
interview with writer and researcher Joanne Laws they outline that, "As artists
who often work with moving image, we had the strong sense that we didn't
want the outcome of our work together (about tactility and the body) to take
an image-based form."[25] Instead, they delegated this process to O'Connor as
well as courtroom artists Alwyn Gillespie and Priscilla Coleman. While the
drafting sessions and rehearsals for the *In the Shadow of the State* project were
captured in this way, there is no formal documentation of the performances—
their traces exist now solely in memory, rumor, written accounts (as above) and
online remnants such as the project's Twitter account.

Figure 7.7 Legal drafting session for *The Touching Contract* by courtroom artist Alwyn Gillespie. Photograph shared on Twitter by @pparchive, dated September 19, 2016.

Throughout its composition the work embraces an ethics of care and mutual support. We see this evidenced in their prohibition against audio-visual documentation within the performance space in order to protect the privacy and intimacy of the experience for participants and performers alike. Self-identified women and femmes[26] were involved at all levels of its technical production; the term the artists use for this is "femtech" and the artists have stipulated that this would be a requirement for future activations of the work.[27] Another aspect of care carried with the work is evident in the artist's specification for a "decompression safe space" after the performance for the participants who "may feel a heightened sensation and require decompression time before they leave the institution."[28] In this space, they are to be offered tea and buttered toast. Anne Mullee's first-hand account of the performance references the familiarity of these basic provisions in maternity settings: "Back in the ante room, we were given tea and toast, like so many newly-minted mothers."[29]

Within conservation frameworks a work's significant properties are often discussed primarily in relation to the tangible and intangible features or qualities present in or embodied by its physical manifestations.[30] Throughout the discussions between IMMA staff and Browne and Jones the artists forefronted the importance of care within all aspects of the work. What became clear to us was how care should be recognized as a highly significant property of the work, present or maintained not only in the work's activations but in all the ways it is

known, experienced and actualized.[31] This is to say that such a centering of care should be understood as a principle guiding not only how the work is materialized in the gallery space but also in the expansion of ownership and stewardship we are discussing here.

Acquisition and care: (re)configuring sedimented practices

> …Significant, unavoidable or frequently occurring risks: Sensations of embarrassment (e.g. blushing, sweating, shaking); Sensations of awkwardness, self-consciousness, nervousness, anxiety (e.g. giggling, digestive discomfort); Feelings of bewilderment or boredom; Interpretative difficulties; Heightened arousal; Regret for time lost; Sense of social difference highlighted through interpretation of performance (gender, age, class, sexuality, ethnicity); Sense of anticlimax….[32]

Given the multi-layered nature of the work and the approach to care woven through it, many vital questions were raised about how IMMA—as a national institution—should act in bringing this work into its collection. During one of our conversations about the work's acquisition with the artists over the summer of 2021, Jones pointed out the centrality of the speculum as an object within the project. She explained how its inclusion within the work symbolized the politics of the gaze and how gaze penetrates, noting how, in the process of working on the acquisition, the original focus on the medical and legal gaze had now shifted to also include the gaze of the museum.[33]

The Touching Contract is one of eleven performance artworks that were purchased in 2020 and 2021 through a special government fund supporting artists during the COVID-19 pandemic.[34] An earlier digitization fund in 2017 was leveraged to holistically approach the conservation of time-based media collection works. On the back of this, the IMMA Collections team has been actively developing and implementing new infrastructures of care through revised practices. This has included improved storage for born-digital materials, across the board integration of artist and stakeholder interviews, greater artwork documentation created at the point of acquisition, retroactive documentation of works in the collection and new interdepartmental collaborations around issues of collection care.

It became apparent early on in our discussions with Browne and Jones that an institutional care for this work could not begin after the work—and all its physical and digital components—had entered the collection, but rather, had to be developed with the artists alongside the acquisition process. Our approach to acquisition was guided from the outset by a respect for the community of making and care that surrounded the work—namely the artists, collaborators and performers. A key catalyst for this was the directive by the artists at the outset that 50% of the acquisition price should be dedicated to supporting the production of documentation in collaboration with contributors and past participants of the work. In this way we began by working to imagine *with* the artists how—as a consequence of the work's acquisition—IMMA and its staff might become a part of that community and help support the work's

Figure 7.8 The Touching Contract, Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 2016. Staged performance documentation at the Pillar Rooms, Dublin, 2016. Photograph: Miriam O'Connor. Performer: Mary Duffin.

continuation in a way that is equitable and aligned with the principles and values that run through the work. This required us to reconceive established acquisition policies and workflows, and use institutional resources to support the creation of a bespoke ethics of care for the work's future, devised with and by the artists rather than imposed on them by the collecting institution.

Early on in these discussion it was agreed that a number of items, both physical and digital, would be handed over as part of the work's acquisition into the IMMA collection. These included the contract itself; the "Archive of Contracting Practices" document; a Sims speculum used during the preparatory workshop in 2016; six digital and two framed photographs by Miriam O'Connor; and the audio soundtrack by Alma Kelliher used during the performance. Importantly, these items were understood as common resources belonging to the community that surrounds the work, whose preservation is necessary because of our common interest in the perpetuation of the work through its future activations. As noted above, acquisition policies and approaches often frame such items in transactional terms as "deliverables," where an institution such as IMMA obtains ownership over a work's constituent components from artists in exchange for payment, and the artwork is spoken about and treated as a traded commodity or possession; we can connect this in part to the legitimate anxieties of collecting institutions around the risks posed by an artwork dependencies remaining "external," particularly when there is an expectation that an artwork and all its constituent elements now "belong" to an institution. However, in the case of

The Touching Contract, its ownership and constituent elements are fundamentally shared and distributed. For one, it is an editioned work, a "one of one," but with Browne and Jones retaining their AP or *artist's proof* [35] and thus their copyright and other associated rights. As has been explained to us by researcher Zoë Miller—who collaborated with us in the review of contracts drafted in conjunction with the work's acquisition—the sale of the work to IMMA as an editioned work is effectively a license of use following particular agreed-upon conditions, rather than a transfer of copyright. In addition, because the work is the product of a collaborative artistic practice, the use of the photography and soundtrack employed in the work required sub-licenses from Miriam O'Connor and Alma Kelliher as part of the acquisition. It became clear to us that the "whom" to which these items *belong*—both in a legal sense and in terms of the individuals that have invested them with significance and value—is plural; it includes the artists and artistic collaborators, and, through this web of licensing, now involves IMMA. As such, the ownership and care for this work is and will have to be, by necessity, collective and collaborative.

In practical terms our collecting of particular materials and knowledge with a view towards the work's perpetuation was approached not in terms of institutional possession but instead following the logic of the work's rhizomatic existence and ownership, both in and outside the museum. IMMA as an institution with particular staffing, infrastructural and financial resources is able to attend to the practical maintenance of an artwork's components in a way that artists very often cannot, for example, in the archiving and preservation of digital components, data and documentation, and the climate-controlled, archival storage of certain physical elements. On our end we are leveraging our infrastructure to safeguard these shared resources with the understanding that they belong not only to IMMA but also the artists and collaborators. Framing all these items in terms of common resources that benefit our mutual interest in the work's futurity (as opposed to just the institution's interests) moves away from thinking about materials and knowledge in purely capitalist terms, and further reinforces the ethos of mutual support inscribed within the work. This is one way the particularities of *The Touching Contract* have prompted a reconfiguration of thinking and practice at IMMA—what might be described as a *reversal of touch*.

In her book *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, María Puig de la Bellacasa considers in relation to care what she calls "the reversibility of touch" or "intra-touching," drawing upon Karen Barad's notion of intra-activity. She notes that Barad's concept of *intra-action* "problematizes not only subjectivity but also the attribution of agency merely to human subjects (of science)—as the ones having power to intervene and transform (construct) reality." [36] According to Barad's theory of agential realism, matter is not passively viewed, analyzed, or studied by human subjects. Rather, it is "a dynamic intra-active becoming" [37] where—in their meeting—entangled parts of the world are made intelligible, conditionally determinate, and (re)configure the other. [38] Puig de la Bellacasa extends Barad's ideas, noting how "there is no separateness between observing and touching." [39] To touch is to be touched, a recognition that "undermines the grounds of the invulnerable, untouched position

of the master-subject-agent that appropriates inanimate worlds."[40] This of course has ethical implications as "what we do in, to, a world can come back, reaffect someone, somehow."[41] "Touch," Barad notes, "is never pure or innocent. It is inseparable from the field of differential relations that constitute it."[42] Indeed, the process of taking any artwork into a collection happens always already in the shadow of the museum's historical connections to imperialism and colonialism, and the innumerable acts of violence enacted in the name of collecting and care that haunt and echo through our current practices.

Thinking with these ideas in the context of the musealization process for *The Touching Contract*, we propose that one counter to these legacies might be through a conscious aeration of sedimented museological practices,[43] where acquisition is refigured as a process of intra-touching. As a material-discursive practice implicated in the iteratively reconfiguring intra-activity of the world, musealization can be reformulated in agential realist terms as a "mutual con-stitution of entangled agencies"[44] or an ongoing, intra-touching between insti-tutional staff, the artists, collaborators, past participants, the museum-as-apparatus, the artwork and its materialities and the world of which we are entan-gled parts. Responding to Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, Barad asserts that

> discursive practices are themselves material (re)configurings of the world through which the determination of boundaries, properties, and meanings is differentially enacted. That is, discursive practices as boundary-making practices are fully implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity through which phenomena come to matter. The dynamics of intra-activity entail matter as an active "agent" in its ongoing materialization.[45]

What *The Touching Contract* has been, is and can be—how it *matters*—is not just mediated or *touched* by the human subjects involved; it also touches back and (re)configures.[46] This touching occurs not only through the work's activa-tions, where audiences are quite literally touched by performers, but also in the ways it has and continues to shift thinking and practice around wider processes of musealization, ownership and care within IMMA. This arises, in part, through (and therefore requires) an institutional *response-ability*, that is, a responsiveness and "being in touch"[47] both to the principles of the work and the entangled histories of institutionalization, where conditions are created for it to touch back and thereby expose and rework what has been sedimented.

Being in touch: acquisition residency

> …Uncommon, but more serious risks: Outbursts of emotion (tears, rage, confu-sion, laughter); Panic attacks; Auditory illusions; Feelings of inspiration; Sleep disturbances; Sense of becoming undone; Sense of being overcome; Sense of accomplishment or empowerment; Sense of powerlessness / impotence; Onset of spontaneous civil disobedience; Risk of radicalisation; Hypersensitivity to the future touch of the State…[48]

Figure 7.9 The Touching Contract, Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 2016. Legal mediator sealing a contract at the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, 2016. Photograph: Miriam O'Connor.

Our critical attention to how the legacies of imperialism, colonialism and also postcolonialism intersect with the structures and practices of collecting and care—made explicit by this acquisition—is, in many ways, a continuation of some of the thinking that has been resonating at and about IMMA since its founding. Housed in The Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, founding director Declan McGonagle described IMMA's site shortly after it opened as an

> architectural and conceptual product of the Enlightenment built by the English in the late 17th century to house retired soldiers. Ireland's first neoclassical building, it was a partial copy of Les Invalides, in Paris—this at a time when Dublin was architecturally a medieval city. Like Derry's geometric street grid, the Royal Hospital's classicism represented an imposition of order on native 'chaos.' Later, that imposition became entirely literal, when the British used the hospital as an army barracks during the Irish rebellion of 1916.[49]

It is, he goes on to say,

> impossible to pretend innocence or neutrality in this building. The context must be admitted as part of the museum's subject in the production and mediation of artworks. When its own site is contested in terms of its

colonial history, the museum is forced to be an inclusive, porous institution rather than an art terminus. It is a function, not just a building.[50]

Artmaking and collecting have co-existed as part of that function of IMMA since its beginnings with a series of on-site artists' studios hosting artistic residencies. This deliberate channeling of energies into artistic practice, engagement and process follows a line of thinking that structured the early years of the institution, articulated by McGonagle in the same article. His outline of the problematic disarticulations of objects from their contexts echoes Azoulay's searing critique of museological and archival practices and the severance of objects from owners:[51]

> Museums, galleries, and their alternatives, for example, still sometimes thought of as protected spaces within modernity, are actually deeply embedded in it. Indeed, the Modernist model of separation and disconnection, in which the supposedly intrinsic qualities of an artwork are more valued than its extrinsic links with a context and web of meaning, has led directly to the conceptual, organizational, and financial cul-de-sac in which many such institutions find themselves, especially in metropolitan centers. Like the matrix that spawned them, they are trapped in a state of *being* rather than *becoming*.[52]

It is important to reiterate that the leveraging of resources towards an acquisition process rooted in the ethical framework within which *The Touching Contract* emerged was instigated by Browne and Jones who, at the outset, proposed a 50:50 split in the acquisition price between their fee and the costs of producing documentation together with their collaborators and past participants in the performance. In order to support this we invited the artists to work on site at IMMA for a period of two weeks in March 2022 as part of IMMA's long-standing artist residency program run by Janice Haugh. They used the time and space offered by the residency to invite feedback and engagement from the various stakeholders in the project. This took the form of workshops with performers of the 2016 activation at the Rotunda Hospital who retrospectively rehearsed what they remembered of the original choreography, and an online meeting with collaborators and audience members, who were invited to respond to a series of prompts about their experience of the work. As a key figure within the work, Máiréad Enright was invited to join the residency for a few days where she supported Browne and Jones in structuring the discussions and providing information on the legal materials she produced for the work. Everyone involved was remunerated for their time as part of the agreed acquisition price and the artists were careful to provide settings of support and care for everyone who engaged during the two weeks. Towards the end of the second week, Browne and Jones hosted an information-sharing event with IMMA staff to talk about the acquisition and engage questions and feedback on how the work might be supported and activated collaboratively across the different departments, including curatorial, engagement and learning, front of house, security, marketing and press. Other elements of the residency included the
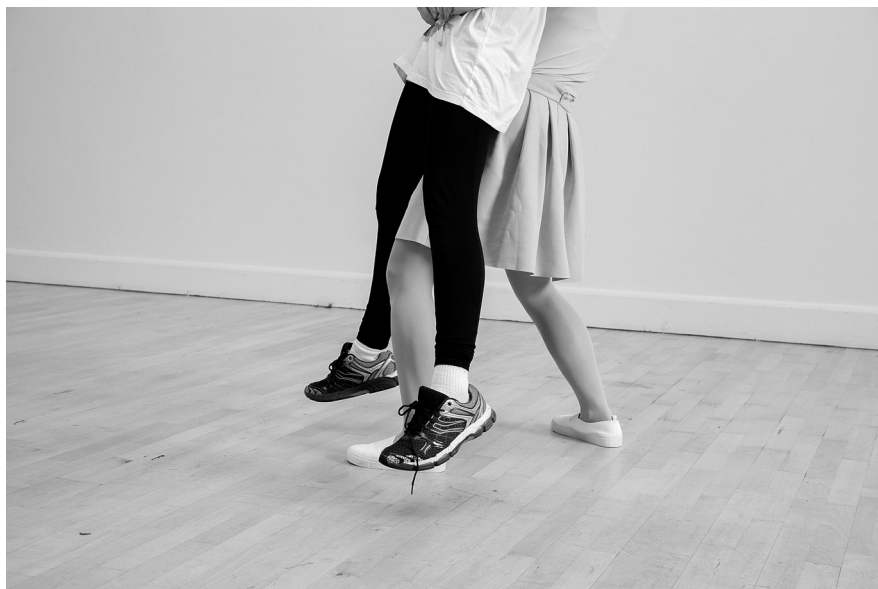
Figure 7.10 The Touching Contract, Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, 2016. Staged performance documentation, Dublin, 2016. Photograph: Miriam O'Connor.

identification of four appointed custodians, the development of an "activation document," an indexed archive of supporting materials to guide future activations of the work, a "methodology document" detailing the overarching principles and ethos of the work, and the final production and packaging of digital and physical components.

As outlined above, many constituent elements of *The Touching Contract* necessarily reside outside the museum, including as embodied memory and knowledge living with the artists and past contributors. The experience of the residency has become a model for how to approach these complexities. It is our hope that we may approach future acquisitions in a similar fashion, where artists, their collaborators and IMMA staff are afforded the time and space to *intra-act* and creatively bring artworks—and the knowledge related to them—into the collection and archive, and potentially instigate further institutional reconfigurations.

Conclusion

IMMA as a national collecting institution has particular resources and expertise that can be mobilized in the service of the shared interests of artists, stakeholders and the museum around the continuation of artworks and their affective potentials. Centering the acquisition process for *The Touching Contract* around an on-site artist residency recognized the work's musealization as a continuation of the work's creation and making that requires and deserves time,

space and resource. It also reflects our intention that through a slow approach to the work's acquisition—with a critical eye turned towards normative models for acquisition, ownership and collection care—*The Touching Contract* might serve as a model for how IMMA approaches the acquisition of other works with distributed authorships, dispersed physical, digital and social dimensions, and a reliance on networks of embodied knowledge.

In this sense, one way a decolonial "collection care" might be realized is through a conscious leveraging of institutional power and resources to facilitate response-able, collaborative and equitable exchanges within and between the institution, a work's creators and other stakeholders. Moreover, when a work's "transfer of ownership" is more accurately framed and approached as an *extension* of ownership, the contents of an institution's collection and archive are affirmed as shared, common resources, rather than possessions held in a closed repository that serve first and foremost the interests and agenda of the collecting institution. Our hope is that through further response-able intra-touching, the artworks in and entering the collection may continue to touch back, wherein their internal ethics may reverberate and continue to reconfigure our own thinking and practices.

Notes

1 Although they are interconnected, the acquisition by IMMA includes only the Dublin version of *The Touching Contract*, one of a series of participatory live events that were part of *In the Shadow of the State*.
2 See also Walter Mignolo, "Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity: Fred Wilson's Mining the Museum (1992)," in *Globalisation and Contemporary Art*, ed. J. Harris (New York: Blackwell Publishing, [2004] 2011), 71–85; and Hélia Marçal, "Becoming Difference: On the Ethics of Conserving the In-Between," *Studies in Conservation* (2021): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1947074.
3 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 170.
4 Azoulay, *Potential History*, 170.
5 Azoulay, *Potential History*, 174.
6 Azoulay, *Potential History*, 170.
7 Hanna B. Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive: Time, Change, and Materiality in Media Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 32.
8 Dragan Espenschied and Klaus Rechert, "Fencing Apparently Infinite Objects: Defining Productive Object Boundaries for Performative Digital Objects," in *Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Digital Preservation, iPRES 2018, Boston, MA, USA, September 24-28, 2018*, ed. N. McGovern and A. Whiteside (2018): 1–4. https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6F2NM.
9 Extract from the written contract for the Dublin performance of *The Touching Contract*. As part of the acquisition, the contract document will enter the IMMA collection as a digital file to be printed and signed by participants during performances.
10 Artangel, "In the Shadow of the State," accessed March 2, 2021, www.artangel.org.uk/project/in-the-shadow-of-the-state.
11 The artists underline that the use of the term "women" in relation to performers and participants throughout the work refers to self-identified women. They also acknowledge the fact that a number of performers no longer identify as women.

12 Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, "The Touching Contract," artist website, accessed March 8, 2021, www.sarahbrowne.info/work/the-touching-contract.

13 For participants wanting to engage in the performance but not consenting to be touched, there was an option to "observe" which entailed being blindfolded so that they could hear but not see the performance.

14 The artists note that many of the mediators for the Dublin performance were former or current students of either Browne and Jones, in their respective art lecturing roles, or activists, or somehow involved with law, meaning everyone brought into the project was connected in some way.

15 Máiréad Enright and Tina Kinsella, "Legal Aesthetics in *The Touching Contract*: Memory, Exposure and Transformation," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 1–23 (January 2021): 6. https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872120987113.

16 Enright and Kinsella, "Legal Aesthetics in *The Touching Contract*," 6.

17 Enright and Kinsella, "Legal Aesthetics in *The Touching Contract*," 6–7.

18 Anne Mullee, "Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones *The Touching Contract*," *The Visual Artists' News Sheet Critique Supplement* Edition 28 (November–December 2016), https://visualartistsireland.com/the-touching-contract.

19 Extract from the 1916 Proclamation (also known as Proclamation of the Republic, Forógra na Poblachta or the Easter Proclamation), signed by Thomas J. Clarke, Seán Mac Diarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, P. H. Pearse, Éamonn Ceannt, James Connolly and Joseph Plunkett, April 24, 1916.

20 Marie Coleman., "How Women Got Involved in The Easter Rising – And Why It Failed Them," *The Conversation* (April 2016), https://theconversation.com/how-women-got-involved-in-the-easter-rising-and-why-it-failed-them-55771.

21 Enright and Kinsella, "Legal Aesthetics in *The Touching Contract*," 5.

22 "Executive summary of the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes," Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Government of Ireland, January 12, 2021, www.gov.ie/en/publication/22c0e-executive-summary-of-the-final-report-of-the-commission-of-investigation-into-mother-and-baby-homes.

23 Although the referendum resulted in the legalization of abortion in Ireland, the new law has built in restrictions, including requirements to travel extensively and attend repeat medical appointments, affecting access for pregnant people from marginalized groups. This disproportionately impacts those from low-income backgrounds, migrants, asylum seekers and Irish Travellers, who already experience barriers to medical care and mobility. In Northern Ireland, abortion was decriminalized in October 2019 but is also burdened by restrictions to access.

24 Enright and Kinsella, "Legal Aesthetics in *The Touching Contract*," 3–4.

25 Joanne Laws, "Towards a Post-Patriarchal State," *The Visual Artists' News Sheet* (November–December 2016): 14.

26 femme – noun & adj.: Someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine-presenting queer woman or people. See: https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary.

27 Here we use the term "activation" to describe the set of public performances and all artwork-related materials installed and displayed in the gallery in conjunction with these performances (see Louise Lawson, Acatia Finbow, and Hélia Marçal, "Developing a Strategy for the Conservation of Performance-Based Artworks at Tate," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 42, no. 2 (2019): 114–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/19455224.2019.1604396.)

28 Notes from conversations between the artists and IMMA staff during acquisition research stage.

29 Anne Mullee, "Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones *The Touching Contract*," *The Visual Artists' News Sheet Critique Supplement* Edition 28 (November–December 2016), https://visualartistsireland.com/the-touching-contract.

30 For further discussion see Brian Castriota, "Variants of Concern: Authenticity, Conservation, and the Type-Token Distinction," *Studies in Conservation* 67, no. 1–2 (2022): 72–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1974237.

31 Here the term *actualization*—in a Deleuzian sense—is invoked to refer to the diverse ways in which a work exists within a plane of actuality (see André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2010): 28–48, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767700001029; Brian Castriota, "Instantiation, Actualization, and Absence: The Continuation and Safeguarding of Katie Paterson's 'Future Library' (2014–2114)," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 60, no. 2–3 (2021): 145–160, https://doi.org/10.1080/01971360.2021.1977058.)

32 Extract from the written contract for the Dublin performance of *The Touching Contract*.

33 A key idea of feminist film theory, the concept of the male gaze (relating to the objectification of women in visual representations) was introduced by scholar and filmmaker Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

34 IMMA Director, Annie Fletcher, advocated for this funding to support the establishment of a body of performance works within the collection. This marks the first time that performance has been collected by the museum, which opened in 1991 and houses a collection of approximately 3,500 objects.

35 Following how printed works have historically been editioned to limit the number of copies made of one image, the same approach is adopted by artists and galleries for the sale of many time-based media, installation, and performance artworks.

36 Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 114.

37 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 151.

38 For discussions of Karen Barad's agential realism in the context of conservation see Hélia Marçal, "Towards a Relational Ontology of Conservation," in *Transcending Boundaries: Integrated Approaches to Conservation. ICOM-CC 19th Triennial Conference Preprints, Beijing, 17–21 May 2021*, ed. J. Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2021): 1–9; Brian Castriota and Hélia Marçal, "Always Already Fragment: Integrity, Deferral, and Possibility in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage," in *Das Fragment im digitalen Zeitalter. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen neuer Techniken in der Restaurierung*, ed. U. Schädler-Saub and A. Weyer (Berlin: Hendrik Baßler Verlag, 2021): 63–78; Marçal, "Becoming Difference;" Brian Castriota, "The Enfolding Object of Conservation: Artwork Identity, Authenticity, and Documentation," in *Conservation of Contemporary Art: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice*, ed. R. van de Vall and V. van Saaze (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, forthcoming); and Marçal's contribution to this volume (Chapter 3).

39 Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 114.

40 Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 115.

41 Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*, 115.

42 Karen Barad, "On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (v1.1)," in *Power of Material/Politics of Materiality*, ed. S. Witzgall and K. Stakemeier (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2014), 143–164.

43 This phraseology is borrowed from Barad's discussion of their diffractive methodology; see Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (2014): 168–187, https://doi.org/10.1080/ 13534645.2014.927623.

44 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

45 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 151.

46 In her application of Barad's agential realism to conservation practices, Hélia Marçal has commented, "One natural consequence of considering the world as a product of intra-actions is the understanding that every act of knowing transforms both the knower and the known. This way of seeing knowledge-production activities means that

every intra-action with an artwork changes the conservator. In that sense, not only do the conservator and the artwork change with that encounter, but possibly also conservation itself." Marçal, "Towards a relational ontology of conservation," 4.

47 The concept of response-ability is central to Barad's agential realist onto-ethico-epistemology; they explain: "*Response-ability,* being in touch, is about being ethically in touch with the other, as opposed to pretending to theorize from the outside (as if this is the condition for objectivity, rather than a conception of objectivity that is deeply flawed)— which is a form of violence—and realizing that observers and theorizers are an integral part of it." Karen Barad and Daniela Gandorfer, "Political Desirings: Yearnings for Mattering (,) Differently," *Theory & Event* 24, no. 1 (2021): 24, https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2021.0002. Barad notes that the figuring of responsibility as an "ability to respond" first appears in the writing of Gloria Anzaldúa; see Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 20–21. Marçal has also extended the concept to conservation practices; see Marçal, "Towards a Relational Ontology of Conservation," 6, and her contribution in this volume (Chapter 3).

48 Extract from the written contract for the Dublin performance of *The Touching Contract*.

49 Declan McGonagle, "Ireland's Eyes, New History From Beyond the Pale," *Artforum* 31 (1993): 93.

50 McGonagle, "Ireland's Eyes," 93.

51 Although Azoulay goes further with this to look at the violence enacted by the museum apparatus on those othered by it.

52 McGonagle, "Ireland's Eyes," 92.

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8 Towards a performance continuum

Archival strategies for performance-based artworks

Farris Wahbeh

Introduction: Live acts, contingent displays and the archive

The representation of live events as documentation has been present in the past, as evidenced by the etchings of European firework displays in fete books of the 17th century.[1] While providing detailed visual documentation of a historical event, these etchings betray the most elemental of all documentary traces of a live act: the experiential context of the movement, sound, smell and physicality of being in that moment. As the live act has increasingly become a core medium in the arts, recordkeeping practices have grown in importance, given the inherent tension of representing that which has already been enacted and, subsequently, reenacting that which has been enacted before. As an experiential live act, performance art includes traces of the oral, aural and corporeal, from when a work originates through its subsequent activations, and is intertwined in a nexus of those corporeally-performed acts. The physicality of performers is in conversation with other bodies, spaces and physical components that are used in a work, and as time advances away from the original exposition, material traces of that act accumulate. In the interval between a performance and its future manifestations lie the remnants of those very acts themselves, the material and immaterial accumulation of printed matter, cultural artifacts and oral and bodily traditions.

The archive is one location where these distilled records live, but in many cases they do not, as a performance work is bracketed by its temporality. In exploring the dynamic between the archive and the live act, Rebecca Schneider interrogates the opposition between materiality and the experiential embodiment performance takes. As Schneider notes,

> When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of reappearance […] we almost immediately are forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to a document, to the object, to bone versus flesh.[2]

The disappearing act of the archive and the remaining act of performance expose their fault lines when understood as diametrically opposed. But as Schneider demonstrates, while the division between the two might be opposed,

they are not mutually exclusive: "[T]he past performed and made explicit as performance can function as the kind of bodily transmission conventional archivists dread, a counter memory—almost in the sense of an echo."[3] This echo, one that is relayed across time and space through the reappearing act of a performance itself, positions the live act as not disappearing, but constantly reverberating, enabling a practice that simultaneously understands the archive as a (disappearing) repository while circulating information through a public that pluralizes the function of the archive by storing, transmitting and enacting memory based traces. These traces are conventionally understood in the archives as physical or electronic records.

The "counter-memory" that archivists dread, and that Schneider alludes to as being fostered by "bodily transmission," derives from archival concepts that place an emphasis on material and evidentiary record keeping practices. These practices privilege a historically linear lifespan from a known entity or provenance. The concept neatly defines the different stages that archival materials go through as they are processed, who manages them during specific periods, and outlines their usefulness during their life. Known also as the "life-cycle" concept, it has held sway in archival practices since the 1960s. However, a countertheory that complicates the tidiness of this premise has been developed to expand where the "life-cycle" constricts. Known as the "records continuum" model, the theory ripples outwardly and inwardly from the point of archival origination, thereby providing a larger universe from which to contextualize, organize and capture materials.

Much can be gleaned from the records continuum model as it relates to the archival documentation practices of contemporary performance art. While not prescriptive, the model and its theory can pull focus from traditional archival concepts to reflect on how performance-based art can be understood as a practice that defies both materiality and chronology.[4]

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the archival theories of both the "life-cycle" concept and the "records continuum" model. I will follow by presenting an outline of elements relating to performance works and lastly, I will model how performance art can be understood from a records continuum perspective. In doing so, I will situate performance art as a continuum of instances that spans across space and time and whose complexity is reflected in varying forms of documenting and archiving.

Archival theory

Used traditionally in North American archival practices, the "life-cycle" concept was articulated in the 1960s by Theodore R. Schellenberg, an archivist at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).[5] Broadly, the "life-cycle" model (Figure 8.1) proposes distinct phases within a record's lifespan.

The first phase, "creation," describes the moment when a record was created by an entity (such as a person, business or organization), indicating an event that necessitated the record's creation. Secondly, "active use" denotes a period

Life-Cycle Concept
Distinct time bound stages

Creation	Active Use	Semi-Active Use	Final Disposition
When the record was created by an entity indicating an event necessitated the record's creation.	A period of time when the newly created record will be used by those who created it or from whom it was created.	The semi-active period sees the record's active use diminished. The record may remain in custody with the entity that created it or be moved to an easily retrievable location.	At the end of the record's life cycle, it is either disposed or moved to the archive for permanent retention.

T i m e

Figure 8.1 Diagram of the life-cycle concept based on an abridged version from Frank Boles, *Selecting & Appraising Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2005). Illustration by the author.

of time when a newly created record is used by those who created it. Thirdly, the "semi-active use" period sees the record's active use being diminished, when it may remain in custody with the entity who created it or be moved to an easily retrievable location. Lastly, "final disposition" is the end of the record's life-cycle, where a decision must be made to either archive the record permanently or to dispose of it.[6] This particular archival theory is centered on how records function *before* they are deposited into an archive. When records are still being actively used, the theory maintains that they remain with their creator until a decision is made as to whether they should be retained for archival purposes.

The life-cycle concept also details who manages the records at each stage: the record's creator handles materials in the creation and active use cycles, while a records manager oversees records in the semi-active use phase, and an archivist manages records in their final deposit into a repository.

As a counter principle, the records continuum is an Australian record keeping model defined as "a consistent and coherent regime of management processes from the time of the creation of records (and before creation, in the design of record-keeping systems) through to the preservation and use of records as archives."[7]

Developed in part to accommodate the rise of electronic and born digital records, where records creators are numerous, the model seeks to expand the linear lifecycle of a record into a larger space time continuum. With many actors across space involved in creating records, the context for these records is continuously changing from the time of their creation, given the velocity with which records are circulated, downloaded and stored in environments outside of their origination. The records continuum thus mirrors the complexity of how records are created in contemporary society. It also allows for a larger net to be cast across space and time for records that the earlier, linear life-cycle model does not articulate.

The records continuum was developed in the 1990s and is characterized as

> a way of graphically representing the moving out from an initial communication which occurs in recordkeeping. The threading outwards in time and space occurs within the processes of recordkeeping and so does the institutionalization of our practices in creating documents, capturing records, organizing memory and pluralizing memory.[8]

The records continuum model de-emphasizes the time-bound stages of the life cycle model and combines the record-keeping and archiving processes into time-space dimensions (Figure 8.2).

The model revolves around four axes: transactionality, the axis that relates to records as products of activities; identity, which refers to the authorities who create and maintain the records; evidentiality, which relates to records as a trace or form of evidence; and recordkeeping containers, the axis that refers to the vehicles and carriers for the storage of records. Each axis is in turn part of a dimension. These dimensions are depicted in the diagram as four nested circles, which represent a rippling outward or a pressuring inwards. Four dimensions are identified: "create" represents the creation of a record and the evidentiary trace of its origination; "capture" signifies the retention of records after initial creation and contextualizes the records function within the environment in which they were created by the entities who created them "organize" describes the collecting and organizing of records within a system, thereby providing context and relation within a historical framework and "pluralize" disseminates the record and places it within the
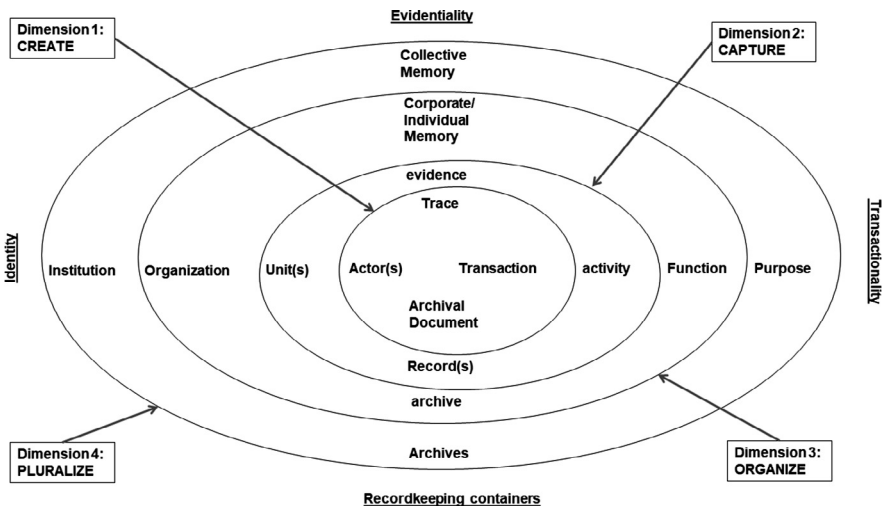
Figure 8.2 Diagram of the "Records Continuum" model, originally published in Frank Upward, "The Records Continuum," in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, ed. Sue McKemmish et al. (Wagga Wagga, Australia: Center for Information Studies, 2005), 203. Illustration by the author.

collective memory of a larger group of records, contextualizing that memory within the institutional parameters of its retention.[9]

The points within the continuum are fluid and can happen simultaneously. As Frank Upward, one of the key writers on the theory, explains:

> The continuum provides a way of explaining complex realities in relation to what used to be regarded as the separate dimensions of space and time. As a view it presents a multi-layered and multi-faceted approach which can be used to re-organize knowledge and deploy skills. It is more in tune with electronic communications and technological change than a life cycle view.[10]

The striking difference between the progressive linearity of the traditional life cycle concept and the multiplicity of space and time in the records continuum model is in the latter's ability to address how materials can be created and captured. As Sue McKimmish explains, "while a record's content and structure can be seen as fixed, in terms of its contextualization, a record is always in the process of becoming."[11] As McKimmish elucidates, "records in oral forms including the works spoken, heard, remembered, recalled and witnessed" are integral to, as Schneider terms it, the "counter-memory" of that work itself.[12] For performance-based works of art, this is an integral point: since these artworks can be created by an artist as a set of actions, future manifestations are enacted through a generative study of incorporating processes outlined by the artist as well as from others who have performed the work in the past, whether through visual, written or oral record keeping practices. Similar to the records continuum model of a record "always in the process of becoming," performance-based works also become active through a process of enacting actions based on archival traces of previous performance instances.

The traditional life-cycle concept does not formalize, or indeed articulate, this complexity, which makes the records continuum a necessary model to alleviate archival concerns (that *dread*) of different forms of memory-based traces not traditionally incorporated into the archival ecosystem. This is in part due to the linearity of the life-cycle, the privileging of materials that have "values" (such as evidentiary or historic) as well as its emphasis on the physical materiality of records.[13]

Performance art: The work and performed instances

Turning to the archival elements of performance-based artworks, what follows outlines building blocks for what can constitute a performance-based artwork. While not comprehensive, they provide a compass to aid in identifying informational elements, such as what constitutes the work and future performances of it, that assists in conceptualizing aspects of performance art.[14]

In documentation practices related to art, the precedence given to capturing the durational aspects of works such as performance has a corollary with conserving time-based media and installations. Foregrounding both the object

based and experiential aspects of these works, Pip Laurenson positions this practice as residing in a spectrum between performance and sculpture.[15] While time-based works are both object and event, their essence lies in a gap between their physicality as objects and the very witnessing of that object in a specified time of its installation. In Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone* from 1973 for example, the artist installed, in a smoke- or mist-filled room, a projector that emanated a 16 mm film of a line forming a cone into circular light. Through the process of its installation and projection, the audience engages with the projected film and the space itself (in a gallery rather than a cinema) thereby activating the entire environment through the actions of walking through the projected light and fog.

Using Nelson Goodman's philosophical concepts of the autographic (that which is singular and stable such as a painting and sculpture) and the allographic (works that are multiple and event based such as time-based media and music), Laurenson articulates a two-stage process to understanding these works: the first being a score or set of specifications that are envisioned by an artist and, second, the subsequent instances that are enacted from those. As Laurenson writes:

> Performances can occur in different times and different places with different performers and still be authentic instances of that performance. In the performance of a musical work it is recognized that there is a gap between a work as represented as a score and its performance. This allows us to speak of good and bad performances while still being able to say that a work is the same work even if badly performed. There is room for interpretation.[16]

This particular gap of a work being activated subsequent to its original creation creates a space from which the actual realization of the work can differ from its original incarnation. As Laurenson explains,

> If one accepts that the work is identified with its realization and not simply its specification, this allows for a greater vulnerability to the erosion of the identity of the work through its presentation in the gallery than is the case for a conventional sculpture or painting.[17]

Expanding on the concept of the allographic, conservator Joanna Phillips has developed a documentation system of reports for time-based media works that captures this two-part process: Stage 1: The Score and Stage 2: The Manifestations. As Phillips explains:

> The key reports are the Identity Report capturing the essential score of a work, and the various Iteration Reports, each of which captures one iteration of the work in a specific venue, and the decisions underlying the determination of installation components and parameters.[18]

Following these models, I propose to articulate that performance art can be differentiated between the performance "work" and each "performed instance."

The "work" is defined by the artist as a set of actions, environmental conditions and constituents involved in the understanding of the work as a whole. In contrast, each "performed instance" is unique in manifestation, location, constituents and other potential environmental factors as the work persists through different locations and time (Figure 8.3). In this regard, an authority "work record" needs to be created in relation to its "performed instances," which is variable in time, location and constituents.

The key differences between a "work" and its "performed instance" is a recurring point of discussion among artists, curators, conservators and archivists on what to capture and trace in the interval from the "work" and its "performed instance" including, but not limited to, physical elements used in the performance, constituents involved, locations used and technical aspects of staging, lighting and sound.

Similar to Phillips's "Iteration Reports," whenever a "performed instance" is initiated, the instance as a singular event will be documented and catalogued as "event record(s)" while the records of these instances form an aggregate which is captured as an "exhibition record" (Figure 8.4).

Each time the work is performed, an "event record" or singular instance of the performance, will be created and the "work" record will be linked to these. If there are multiple performances during the course of an exhibition, there can be flexibility in regards to how many event records will need to be created for each "performed instance."

Additionally, an "exhibition record," or an aggregate of instances, is created whenever a work is performed. If the work is performed as part of a larger exhibition, the "work" record will be related to this exhibition record. If the performance itself constitutes an exhibition, an exhibition record will be created for the performance and the work record will be linked to the exhibition record.
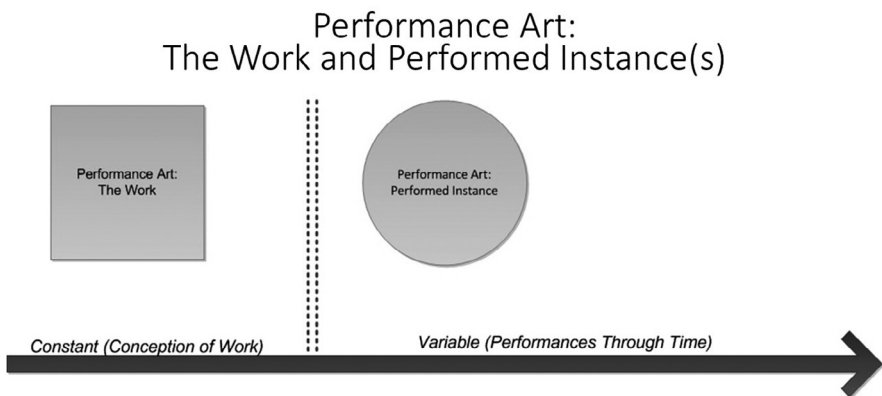
Figure 8.3 Diagram of performance art: The work and performed instance(s). Illustration by the author.

Performance Art:
The Work and Performed Instance(s)
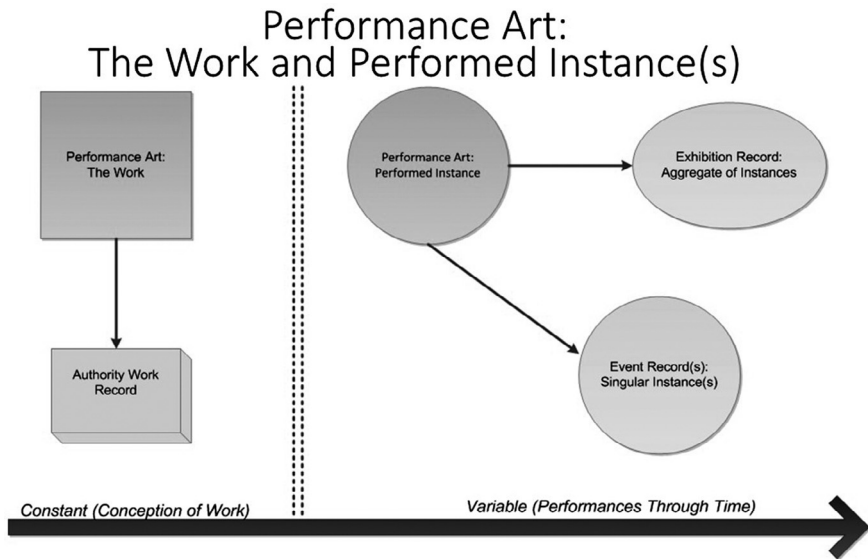
Figure 8.4 Diagram of performance art: Exhibition(s) and event(s) records. Illustration by the author.

The following information can be included in each area described above:

WORK RECORD

For each performance, a separate record will be created as an authority "work record" for the work. This work record is distinct from exhibition records and event records in that it describes the work itself, not the "performed instances" of the work through space and time.

Elements to include for this work record include:

Constituents

> The name of the artist as the creator of the work; list of performers or inter-preters if original to the work; technical contributors (lighting design, sound design) if original to the work itself. Performers and other contributors not ori-ginal to the work are included at the performed instance or at the event and exhibition record level as necessary.

Date

> The date of the work should be when it is conceived. For dates performed, use the specific dates that the work is performed as historical dates. If exhibition label is required, use the modifier "performed," for example "1994, performed

2013." The component name of the performed instance should be the date and location of the work.

Title

The title of the work should be used as the title. If the work has no title, use the convention *(No title)* if a supplied, descriptive title is not preferred. If the work is performed as part of an exhibition, it will be attached to the exhibition record. The title of the component for each performed instance will include the date and location of the manifestation of the work.

Medium

All the materials used during the performance, including number of performers, any sets or objects used, and the duration of the work. If none is preferred or if materials are not known, list "Performance."

Dimensions

Only include dimensions for the work if the artist has prescribed a quantifiable measure of space to the work. Otherwise, do not include descriptive dimensions to the work, such as "Dimensions variable."

Components

If tangible, material components are used in the performance, they can either be integral to the work itself and must be reused whenever the work is performed, or they can be annotated in the précis and must be procured or fabricated when the work is performed. There might be instances where a work requires either case or both.

In either instance, the status of material components should always be defined and understood. In the event that the material components are integral and must be maintained as components to the work, they will be included as part of the work at the component level. After a performed instance, if the material components are not integral, a material component can remain after the work is performed. In this case, the retention of these materials will need to be assessed in terms of the intrinsic historical value of the performed instance or whether they are superfluous given the work's intangible quality. If material components used during the performance can be retained to alleviate future costs in fabricating them, a decision needs to be made on a case-by-case basis.

EVENT RECORD(S)

Each performed instance should also have an "event record," or a singular instance, created for it. Ideally, each performed instance would have an event record, however, there is flexibility in how many event records are created. For example, if a work is performed many times over a period of several months, one event record can be created with a note in the description field outlining the

performance dates, times and locations. If the work is performed only several times during a run, then a decision can be made to create one event record for all the performances or individual event records for each.

EXHIBITION RECORD

In addition to an event record or records, when a work is performed, an "exhibition record," or an aggregate of instances, will be created. If the work is performed as part of a larger exhibition, the work record will be linked to this exhibition record. If the performance itself constitutes an exhibition, an exhibition record will be created for the performance and the work record will be linked to the exhibition record. In this case, the name of the exhibition will be the name of the work. If multiple instances are performed throughout a given period of time, the span of dates should be included.

Taken together, the work and performed instances, along with the authority work, event and exhibition records, develop into a relational structure that emphasizes each unit's interdependency (Figure 8.5).

As a work is performed across time, each instance can be recorded at the singular (event) and aggregate (exhibition) levels while maintaining a genealogy to the original work itself through its linkage to the work. For example, a performance that originated in 1960 at a specific space, with a unique composite of performers, and detailed performance notations from that time, can be associated with future performed instances of the work in its variability in different locations, participants and modified instructions. The reverse is also possible and crucial, where future works can reference past performances in a genealogical chain, a distinction the records continuum includes and the life-cycle concept omits.
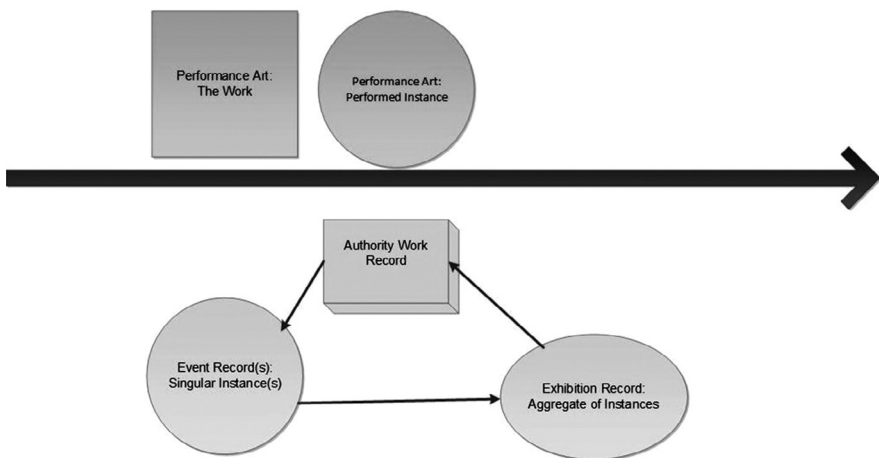
Figure 8.5 Diagram of the relationships between archival units in performance art. Illustration by the author.

The continuum and the archiving archive

As a durational form of art, performance requires a unique approach in terms of its representation in an archival system. The variability of a work's presentation can be captured on various media, such as photographs, video, audio or textual documentation. The role of these various documentary forms is not to be confused for the work of art itself. While each documentary aspect of the work is meant as a historical quotation of a performed instance, the function of these archival records is an illustration of the "work" and functions as a historical trace of that particular performed instance.

These archival records can be created by the artist, their studio or other collecting bodies (such as a museum). Each performed instance can be captured by any of these means and should be retained to understand the genealogy of the work and its performed instances. In most cases, these should be considered historical, documentary resources and catalogued as such to differentiate them from the work. They historically contextualize the work by representing it.

Performance based works are time and space bound. They originate from the artist's original conception of the work and are activated by each performed instance. Archival records that document a work's performed instance may serve as a physical surrogate for it in an exhibition, but what is being exhibited in that instance is not the performance work or performed instance, but rather a material accretion to these. While documentation of performance art can circulate and be exhibited as distinct and singular material, performance-based works are distinct from these elements since they require activation in time and space. While these archival materials are directly connected to the performance work, they are representations of the live act itself, since the physical medium of the former—be it a photographic print or a sculpture—are stable (autographic), while the latter are event based and durational (allographic).[19]

The records continuum can assist, however, in situating the context of archival documentation in relation to the performance work itself. The model's chronological ripple effect from a work's primary exposition and inward from future activations (a record as "always in the process of becoming") can therefore include records created after the date of performative origination, records that essentially exist outside of a progressively linear life-cycle. The continuum also places an emphasis on the plurality of the archival ecosystem, rooting the use of documents within the context of a record's creation, even outside of authorial origination as in the life-cycle concept, as well as the myriad audiences such records potentially serve. Against the grain of the life-cycle of records, which assigns separate boundaries, the continuum underscores that the use of archival records cannot be separated from an original context (the creation and active states) or when they are used in the future (semi-active and disposition states). These are not boundaries, but overlapping densities of creation and use across time.[20]

When records, in the broadest sense, are thought of as outward and inward overlaps, they expose the complexity inherent in how records are created and

used. This becomes ever more critical when archival documentation records variability of the same performance work performed across time and in different locations. Artist interviews, images of documentation, performer instructions and oral histories for works performed after a work's original act, many times in spaces that are significantly different from their original, are crucial in this regard to the continuum's inward documentation.[21]

Additionally, audience engagement and public interactions with performance art can contribute to its historic and contemporaneous activation. An audience member's re-circulation of their recorded video, image or analysis can assist in contextualizing the reappearance of the work in the future (or contextualize it in its historical present). Records' creators, enmeshed as they are in the life-cycle concept in the active phase of an archive's existence, are therefore expanded to include those who reuse, repurpose or recontextualize records and documentation, opening the archive to a plurality of creators and users.

The relevance of the records continuum for record keeping practices is that it lays bare two concepts that the life-cycle concept either ignores or overemphasizes. For the first, the life-cycle concept assumes that an accumulation of records enters an archive organically, while in reality they are processed, organized and catalogued by professionals; and, secondly, it perpetuates the myth that archival records have outlived their use when transferred to the archive and are "dead" records in their final disposition, accumulated in storage for posterity.

On the first point, while records managers and archivists may appraise and designate records for retention due to their evidentiary or historical value, this theory assumes that archivists are impartial and that archival collections and their repositories are unbiased and neutral territories, claims that are both contested and assume a historical narrative of privilege.[22] On the second point, a record's use is always negotiated by its circulation and its purpose in different contexts and across time, even after it has outlived its functional use value. A record from the past found in the archive may be resituated and resuscitated in the future for purposes outside of its original creation, either contradicting or reinforcing its meaning, but nonetheless a part of its genealogy.

As an example, archival historian Michelle Caswell investigates the recirculation and reproductions of mug shots of Cambodian Tuol Sleng victims of the Khmer Rouge years after they were taken and notes:

> The record isn't created just once but re-created (as the by-product of the act of witnessing), recaptured (as new records such as tribunal footage, documentary films, and magazine articles), reorganized (in internal institutional systems), and repluralized (as it published and viewed in formation of collective memory) as it is used again and again or "activated" at various points in time and space.[23]

The records continuum model can wrest meaning from one context (the Khmer Rouge use of mug shots as a form of control) to another (giving survivors and family members of the victims the "power to create records of witnessing").[24]

In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida posits the archive as

> not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.[25]

Following Derrida's line of thought, as performance-based works get activated through performed instances and accrue archival materials in their wake, they produce as much as they record the event, and are indispensable to each other across these different contexts. These singular historical performed instances are critical to understanding a performance-based work when performed across the space and time in which they were created. As a material genealogy, archival records are used as surrogates to reference the original performance act (the "work") and are used in the intervals between performed instances to understand, study and inform future activations. While the archive records the event, it can also assist in producing future events, but needs to be contextualized throughout the archiving continuum in relation to its creation, purpose and circulation. In this respect, while a photograph can reproduce a work, it needs to be relationally structured as such, a material reality of a specific historical instance. The "archiving archive" is very much in the same key as the concepts underpinning the records continuum—that record keeping practices are multi-dimensional and directional—and allows for the ability to circumvent the boundaries of a records life-cycle. As Upward notes, it enables records managers and archivists "to consider how to spread the tension across structures to prevent them from collapsing."[26]

It is no coincidence that the records continuum model and Derrida's lectures and essays on the archive happened in the same period of the 1990s: both parties emphasized that the "collapse" of the life-cycle concept that is married to traditional archival practice began as new digital technologies disrupted and transformed how users created, stored and circulated records and thus new concepts and implementations of the archive had to reflect them.[27] As Caswell underscores, with the records continuum "the archives is not a stable entity to be tapped for facts, but, rather, a constantly shifting process of recontextualization."[28] With the ever increasing role of technology to replicate, circulate and disrupt traditional modes of communication, the records continuum and Derrida's archive fever reflect the ever expanding creation and utilization of archival records and their necessary modes of recontextualization across a wider and dynamic continuum.

Towards a performance continuum

The shifting process of original context and recontextualization that Caswell notes is similar to a performance work and its future instances. These are not

stable relationships but work as an ebb and flow. In the context of performance-based work, the interdependency between a work and its instances, as well as its authority work, event and exhibition records as explained above, all contribute to each other in a circular fashion, drawing from past performances to perform the work in the future. Artists who create a performance work supply the foundation of its creation, while future performers perform that foundation in a new spatial and temporal context.

Envisioning a mapping between the records continuum and performance art underscores the fragility of shifting contexts, while articulating a new archival toolkit. This genealogy of recordkeeping allows for an expansion from a linear chronology to a circular one while incorporating multiple sources of record creators that contribute in an outward and inward fashion.

Illustrating this, one can start by visualizing a horizontal line for the performance artwork, and a vertical line for that work's authority record: Where these two lines meet is when the work is created. Rippling outwards from that point in three concentric circles are: 1) the performed instance of each work; 2) the event record for these instances; and 3) the exhibition record of these aggregated instances. Behind those three concentric circles are the entities who contribute to all of these aspects of the performance work: the artist who creates and performs; the other performers; collaborators (musicians, lighting technicians, costumers, etc.) to the original or future performed instances; and participants and audience members who witness performed instances each time the performance work is activated (Figure 8.6).

As a practice of activation, performance art flows from the original and outward towards those who perform and engage with the work, as do the diverse forms of its archival remnants. Likewise, those who engage with the
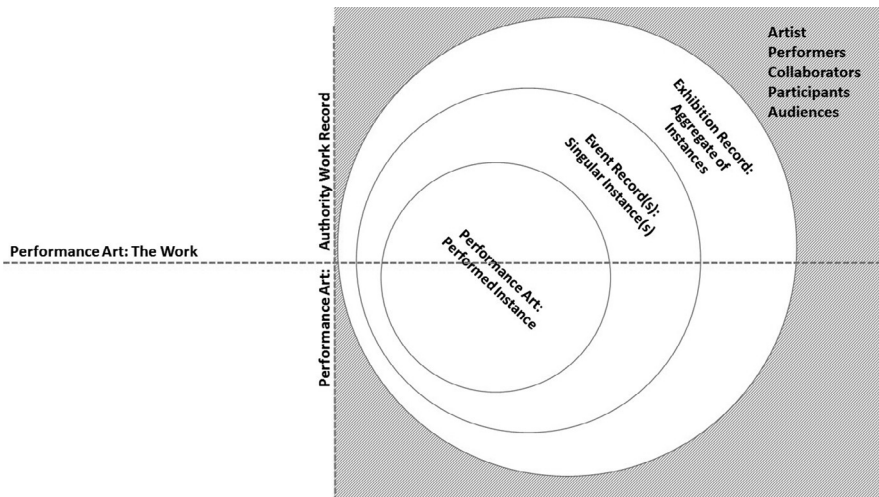
Figure 8.6 Diagram of a proposed performance continuum. Illustration by the author.

work can create and contribute archival material inwardly, from when a work is exhibited towards its instances that are linked to its original conception. As a reverberation tool, a performance continuum acknowledges that materials can come from many creators and that a performed instance can cross different spaces and times (and also remain in one space and time): both contextualizing and recontextualizing as a performance unfolds in a spatio–temporal complex.

Conclusion

When the scholar Julietta Singh muses that the archive is an "enabling fiction"—a practice that "you say you are doing well before you are actually doing it, and well before you understand what the stakes are of gathering and interpreting it"—she echoes Derrida's emphasis that even without the archive "one still believes it was or will have been."[29] Both Singh and Derrida underscore the importance of the archive and the significance of its formation, use and meaning.

Perhaps the enabling fiction that is the archive lies in the assumption that it exists as a known entity, as an entity that exists, will exist or has existed. Conversely, archives can also end up missing, destroyed, purged or erased. The traditional archival theory of the life-cycle concept cannot reconcile the ways in which these actions bear upon the archive. It assumes that the archive exists as an organic and linear composition of records, born from a singular entity. The records continuum, on the other hand, acknowledges that records can be created, found, circulated, reused and further acted upon as an archive that keeps archiving. The model acknowledges that as materials are created and used in varying degrees and for different purposes, the creation and use of these records is dependent on the historical context and the framing of those acts by those who were involved in the execution of the performance.

Properly framing records and contextualizing their creation and use is important for performance-based works of art because it allows the genealogy of a work to be understood as historical instances that are built from each other, from its initial origin to a current context in which it is redeployed. The archival documentation and record keeping practices of performance art, and the system of understanding them within a continuum, puts into relief how historical complexity is intertwined with a performance's reenactment in a current and contemporaneous reality. Grounding the documentation of these complex works through a theory that overlays a performance continuum onto a records continuum gives focus to these works' evolving nature and equips the archive to be receptive to its ever-expanding evolution.

Notes

1 For a historical overview of fete books, fireworks, and public pageantry, the exhibition *In the Library: Pageantry and Pyrotechnics in the European Fete Book* (June 24–September 6, 2019), organized by Yuri Long at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., provides context and historical examples.

2 Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (June, 2001): 103.
3 Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," 106.
4 For a detailed assessment on performance preservation and documentation tools, see "Documentation and Conservation of Performance," Tate, accessed August 20, 2021, https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/documentation-conservation-performance.
5 Philip C. Bantin, "Strategies for Managing Electronic Records: A New Archival Paradigm? An Affirmation of Our Archival Traditions?" *Archival Issues* 23, no. 1 (1998): 17–34.
6 For a historical overview on the archival concept of the "life-cycle concept," see Frank Boles, *Selecting & Appraising Archives & Manuscripts* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 2005), 1–73. The synopsis in this paper is an abridged version of Boles's description of the "life-cycle" model, 51–54.
7 Standards Australia, *Australian Standard 4390, Records Management* (Homebush, New South Wales: Standards Australia, 1996).
8 Frank Upward, "Structuring the Records Continuum, Part Two: Structuration Theory and Recordkeeping," *Archives and Manuscripts* 25, no. 1 (May, 1997): 10–35.
9 Frank Upward, "Structuring the Records Continuum, Part One: Postcustodial Principles and Properties," *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 2 (1996): 268–285; Frank Upward, "Modelling the Continuum as Paradigm Shift in Recordkeeping and Archiving Processes, and Beyond – a Personal Reflection," *Records Management Journal* 10, no. 3 (2000): 115–139.
10 Upward, "Modelling the Continuum," 127.
11 Sue McKemmish, "Traces: Document, Record, Archive, Archives," in *Recordkeeping in Society*, ed. Sue McKemmish et al. (Wagga Wagga, Australia: Center for Information Studies, 2005): 14.
12 McKemmish, "Traces," 14.
13 On evidentiary values and provenance, see Stacy Wood, Kathy Carbone, Marika Cifor, Anne Gilliland and Ricardo Punzalan, "Mobilizing Records: Re-framing Archival Description to Support Human Rights," *Archival Science* 14 (2014): 397–419. The topic of archival materiality is one that has extreme relevance, especially as it relates to what physically remains and what is absent in an archive. For a cogent analysis on the importance of this, see Maryanne Dever, "Papered Over, or Some Observations on Materiality and Archival Method," in *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 65–95.
14 For detailed descriptive practices for documenting performance art, consult the available materials found on the Tate website mentioned in footnote 4. Another resource is the Performance Art Data Structure (PADS) formulated by Stephen Grey, "Conservation and Performance Art: Building the Performance Art Data Structure (PADS)" (MA thesis, Northumbria University, 2008), 49–61. For further reading and insight on developing strategies and workflows for performance art, see: Louise Lawson, Acatia Finbow and Hélia Marçal, "Developing a Strategy for the Conservation of Performance-based Artworks at Tate," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 42, no. 2 (2019): 114–134.
15 Pip Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations," in *Tate Papers,* no. 6 (Autumn 2006): n.p., https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/06/authenticity-change-and-loss-conservation-of-time-based-media-installations, accessed October 30, 2021. Hanna Hölling extends these terms and definitions even more as "autochronic" and "allochronic." Hölling, "Revisions, or on the Aesthetics of Change," Media in the Expanded Field, June 7, 2016, https://mefsite.wordpress.com/2016/06/07/revisions-or-the-aesthetics-of-change, accessed October 30, 2021.
16 Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss."

17 Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss."

18 Joanna Phillips, "Reporting Iterations: A Documentation Model for Time-Based Media Art," *Revista de História da Arte* 4 (2015): 175.

19 As a counter theory, Philip Auslander argues that performance documentation itself can be experienced *as a performance* and not just an indexical trace of it. Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (September 2006): 1–10.

20 Sarah J. A. Flynn, "The Records Continuum Model in Context and its Implications for Archival Practice," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 22, no. 1 (2001): 79–93.

21 This distinction is also important for archival material relating to artists and works of art. I have elsewhere discussed the use of the record's continuum as it relates to artist records in a museum permanent collection documentation setting which differs from records in the institutional archive, as materials relating to works of art and their record keeping are always active and contributed to, which is similar to the continuum model. This is opposed to a "closed" archive where records are deposited after their active and semi-active use by users across the institution. This presentation was titled "Artists' records and the work of art: documentation strategies from the perspective of a records continuum" and was presented at the Museum Computer Network conference in November, 2011. I made similar points in the discussion "Digital Artists' Records in a Curatorial Context: Functional Analysis and Digital Preservation," which was presented at *Is This Permanence: Preservation of Born-digital Artists' Archives*, National Digital Stewardship Residency symposium, Yale Center for British Art, May 2018. A video of the proceedings, accessed September 1, 2021, is available at: https://britishart.yale.edu/videos/permanence-preservation-born-digital-artists-archives. For an analysis on the records continuum and the life cycle concept within a museum and archival setting, see Sarah Haylett, "Archives and Record Management," in *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum*, Tate, accessed September 1, 2021, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible/research-approach-archives-record-management.

22 For an analysis of these assumptions in archival practice and theory, see Mario H. Ramirez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *The American Archivist* 78, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 339–356. In quoting archival theorist Verne Harris, Ramirez's cogent argument stresses that archival terms are indeed marked as biased:

> By questioning whiteness and its semantic markers (such as *tradition, neutrality*, and *objectivity*) and having honest dialogues about how we as a profession and individuals perpetuate inequality, we can liberate ourselves to do the real work of documenting history to our fullest capacity—in turn, inaugurating a praxis that listens "… for the voices of those who are marginalised or excluded by prevailing relations of power" (352).

23 Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 132.

24 Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable*, 133.

25 Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 17. The emphasis is in the original.

26 Upward, "Modelling the Continuum," 127.

27 See Upward, "Modelling the Continuum" for the records continuum and digital technology as well as Derrida, "Archive Fever," 17–18 where he notes,

> […] electronic mail today, and even more than the fax, is on the way to transforming the entire public and private space of humanity, and first of all the limit

between the private, the secret (private or public), and the public or the phenomenal. This is not only a technique, in the ordinary and limited sense of the term: at an unprecedented rhythm, in quasi-instantaneous fashion, this instrumental possibility of production, of printing, of conservation, and of destruction of the archive must inevitably be accompanied by juridical and thus political transformation.

28　Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable*, 13.
29　Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You* (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018), 23.

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9 Peeling the paint off the walls

Kelli Morgan on Black performance and racial justice in Western institutions—A conversation with Hanna B. Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman and Emilie Magnin

Kelli Morgan is a Professor of the Practice and the Inaugural Director of Curatorial Studies at Tufts University. She is a critical race scholar as well as a curator, educator and social justice activist who specializes in American art and visual culture. Her scholarly commitment to the investigation of anti-Blackness within those fields has demonstrated—among others, in persuasively formulated statements[1]—how traditional art history and museum practice work specifically to uphold white supremacy. Morgan has held curatorial positions at the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, the Birmingham Museum of Art, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Before joining the Tufts faculty, she held various teaching positions where she merged the classroom and the museum gallery to create anti-racist paradigms for how curators can actively address the complexities of traditional art history, community engagement and scholarly innovation. In this conversation, Morgan discusses the endurance of Black performance, reforming museum practices and her work as an educator.

Hanna Hölling: Kelli, your expertise in American art and visual culture, particularly your commitment to investigating anti-Blackness, provides a valuable perspective for examining how conservation operates and how it perpetuates, not only objects, but also certain structures within the institutions that are often based on, and codify, white supremacy. Our current research centers on performance and the questions of whether it might be preserved. Art history and museum practices often have preconceived notions about what it means to preserve performance. With an awareness of the rich histories of Black performance and Black tradition that it embodies, we are curious about the unique conditions of care and maintenance required for this type of performance. How can we meaningfully care for performance both inside and outside of museums? How can we preserve radical performativity? Given that these works often combine the radical presence and endurance of the Black body,[2] how can we ensure the preservation of their identity?

Kelli Morgan: When I received your invitation to the conversation on this topic, Hanna, I thought, "oh my God, this is so important!" We rarely know how to think about performance. Often, performance is documented and sits in a file. And we don't necessarily talk about the interpersonal ways through which performance might be conserved—the cultural transmission and, for

instance, human behavior. My recent thinking is directed towards the shift in how we approach collections. This is hard because so much of it is concretized in imperialist and colonial histories. I'm trying to break up these standard ways of thinking.

Valerie Cassel's exhibition "Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art" continues to exist because there is a catalog and exhibition files in various places as the show traveled.[3] But how does the show, and performance, exist beyond a temporary format of the exhibition? And my answer was: this problem has to be solved by rethinking how we approach collecting, and that approach has to be *very* anti-colonial and anti-imperialist. I always mention anti-whiteness as a system—I'm not necessarily anti-white people because we must disconnect these two aspects, not just for white folks, but even for people of color, too.

I've been thinking a lot about how major Western collections exist as repositories of white colonialization and what happens when we completely reinterpret permanent collections through that lens. One way is community engagement, with museum educators and community engagement departments doing work on that front, and just bringing in other voices. This is giving people a stake, ownership in the institution itself.

I've worked on a couple of projects where the community writes the interpretation for shows, artworks and installations. It really is important to do this also with permanent collections—even more so than with exhibitions—because exhibitions are impermanent, they go away after a while, and if there is no publication, or an archive, it is as if the exhibition didn't happen.

These topics became interesting to me in graduate school while reading about Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*.[4] In 1992, Wilson worked with the Maryland Historical Society to place objects of enslavement on prominent view. He assembled the museum's collection in this way to not only mine the museum, but to challenge our worldviews and deeply rooted preconceptions about race, place and the process of knowledge formation. He reenacted this idea so many times in so many different institutions, but it never fundamentally changed curatorial practice. Curators and directors alike reference Wilson's project a lot, but it always amazed me that it still didn't change the way the field approaches curation and collecting and care. So in my mind, there is a deeper problem. It was only after my drama in Indiana[5] that I realized that what I am doing is applying Black radical traditions to museum practice to try to address this problem. Wilson works with permanent collections. I think that, as a start, we must rethink how we approach permanent collections and our interpretation of them. I don't think that's the end. I think that's a start.

HH: Performance enters museum collections somewhat reluctantly; it is a form that is difficult to contain within institutional frameworks. While these conversations are not new, what interests me is whether there is something that we could learn from the processes of acquiring performance, especially in relation to the Black radical tradition. Is it possible that acquiring these types of performance calls for a different approach?

KM: My friend and colleague Bryn Jackson and I—Bryn was the curator of Audience Engagement and Performance at Newfields with me—would have this conversation all the time about the institution not necessarily understanding how to collect performance or if that was even possible and how even just the thought of approaching collecting performance requires a different type of thinking and a different value system. He and I would talk about this all the time, because we often referred to ourselves as "fish out of water." Meaning that we were curators who worked in non-traditional ways that were also employed by a very traditional institution. There is an entire demographic of younger curators now who just think differently than the institutions are designed for. This is why I thought this conversation would be helpful to me too, because even though we work as Black curators, we don't always work in the same ways. I work from a different value system and that value system is not respected, or oftentimes not even acknowledged by institutions.

So, going back to Valerie's show, "Radical Presence," which illustrates different types of Black performativity, we, Black artists and curators, just have to show up and do it. We have to show up and carry out the tenets of our value systems to codify it in a way, which I don't think has happened yet, despite the fact that there is a critical mass of us—Black artists and Black museum professionals—working in the field. That is why I'm currently thinking about documentation versus repetition. Meaning, I'm interrogating the overall *success* of exhibitions and catalogs—the typical ways we document museum work—as the last thirty years of said documentation of Black curatorial work has not changed the toxicity and the discrimination we often face as Black artists and curators. So, I'm asking what are the ways in which performance gets repeated, and how does it change with every repetition? And how can repetition possibly make predominantly white work environments safer for us? I think I am a Black curator who is different in my approach, because I am very anti-whiteness. Thus, I analyze historical work from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, primarily by white male artists, through anti-racist frameworks to demonstrate how whiteness was constructed, which is very distinct from the work that a lot of my Black curatorial colleagues are doing.

So, I think there's a way that we must be in these spaces, doing the work in a repetitive way to solidify or to codify that there are different ways to do the work. It is not something that you can check out of a library. You have to talk to people, and we have to keep this performance alive by passing it down.

HH: Traditional conservation practices have long focused on physical objects, often preserving them in their perceived static materiality. There has been limited consideration, however, for the knowledge or narratives associated with heritage conveyance. Performance, and performance conservation, challenge this status quo by emphasizing the importance of communities and networks of care in knowledge transmission. Despite this, Western museums have historically prioritized, and still prioritize, documentation and archiving in their preservation efforts.

KM: Your ideas remind me also about the discussion around restitution. Western museums are designed to own everything all at once. So, conservation procedures, like traditional curatorial procedures, or archival procedures, exist to maintain these collections that were often stolen, disconnected from their original, cultural and geographical contexts, and then completely redefined around a market that only benefited the people to whom these works didn't belong in the first place. So, the idea that now we should give works back seems problematic. Certain Indigenous nations and certain African nations maintain that some works weren't even supposed to be preserved—they were created to disintegrate or to remain ephemeral. Therefore, they have lost value within their original contexts. Their preservation for museums was a European idea.

Does performance operate similarly, does it disallow that type of ownership? That's a question I have been conversing about with museum leaders and other curators around the States – the collectability of performance. Should we be concerned about keeping performance if we can't hoard it, and value it, or revalue it in a way that benefits the institution? It's hard to sell a performance at auction. Why don't we ever really unpack why we're trying to collect any other art form—painting, sculpture, design—in the first place? Do we even maintain these items properly? How capitalist and greedy are these problems? I think performance forces us to answer these difficult questions because it ultimately forces us to think about how and why we collect in the first place.

Jules Pelta Feldman: It sounds like you're making a connection between lasting institutional change—as opposed to institutional-critique-style interventions that, as you say, rarely last—and the conservation or the passing down of Black performance works. You suggest that if these works are going to be able to change an institution, they will need to last beyond the single event or book or exhibition, to be woven more into the everyday of the institution. When it comes to works or items that might come from different traditions or from artists who have a different way of thinking—what might the needs of these types of works be? And, how can the different perspectives and traditions that they're coming from help us rethink what it means for a performance work to be conserved?

KM: This reminds me of African oral traditions present in Black studies. It isn't true that there is no literary tradition in African culture, as many would have it, but African culture includes primarily an oral tradition. As you said, there are different ways that we can think about conserving, where it's not necessarily about writing something in a log or in an exhibition catalog, but there's a process of verbal passage, verbal exchange. In many African cultures, histories and traditions are preserved by griots. In Indigenous communities, elders often train the next keeper of the community's traditions and histories.

Could this be a new way to approach collecting performance? Is it okay for us to just have it in our heads? Maybe, instead of various institutions, it is about the human mind and the human body as a type of institution that is able to hold and preserve cultural production and historical production.

JPF: That's really fascinating. Could you say more about that idea of human minds as institutions or rather human beings as the carriers of culture, rather than the institutional structures?

KM: We think of ourselves as ephemeral, particularly in the United States. We are aware of death. Nobody wants to die, and nobody wants to get older. We're a country that values youth, but we don't value children. But we have a prevailing belief that once we are gone, there is no continuation, which is why knowledge must be passed on. I'm rethinking what we're capable of as humans. It is an interesting moment to be doing this kind of work, because the United States is so anti-facts and anti-intellectuality right now. Technically, we are like institutions, in terms of what we believe in and how we move through the world. One always has one's own set of beliefs and sometimes, one's own trauma, that really informs how one behaves. So, it's perhaps about finding ways to reprogram or to heal from that way of being. If we can do that as human beings, we can kind of repurpose that type of psycho-emotive essence, sentiment, and act into a way to preserve culture, and into a way to preserve art, too. But we never think about it that way.

Emilie Magnin: I've been looking at the attempts to preserve performance within institutions and obviously, the institutions are currently also looking at the practices of embodied transmission existing in other cultural contexts and are trying to implement them within museum conservation strategies. This is a remarkable development, but I'm also wondering, what does it mean that institutions are involved in extractive practices in that they draw on external knowledge and appropriate it? How do we avoid that? And how do we still benefit from it without being extractive?

KM: It is such a slippery slope, and I think there isn't an easy way to approach these things. As human beings, we like binaries and hate the gray. But I think we're in the gray the majority of the time. And if we were to be diligent, we would need to establish a set of rules. But sadly, the Geneva Convention isn't always considered in war. Exceptions to the rules are made all the time for not the best reasons. Coupled with the fact that the rules are typically established to benefit those with the power anyway. Theoretically it's a great thing to think about ways to adopt other forms of embodiment that could revolutionize collecting and conservation, but ethical implementation of that in my mind comes down to integrity and morality, two things that art museums lack as a whole simply because they are colonial projects. So again, it would take a dismantling of everything that informs what we think.

I remember this interview that Black feminist scholar bell hooks did in the 1990s with PBS journalist and talk-show host Charlie Rose. In it, she states that white supremacy informs everything that we all think all the time, and whether one is willing to admit that or not, one has to deprogram oneself as best you can.[6] I believe that the possibility of becoming "an extraction" is possible. To unplug from the Matrix, so to speak. People must be able to say no, to push back. And I'm most interested in what that would look like in a museum context.

HH: You identify as an Americanist, but above all as "a Black woman from Detroit, Michigan." This identity forms the foundation for your worldview. You also state: "My curatorial philosophy is rooted in a working-class, womanist value system which does not uphold white patriarchy as a standard of universality or excellence."[7] As a woman of color, you are aware that within society at large, "... white-maleness has always been and is still considered to be 'right.'"[8] Although conservation is often perceived as a female profession, it is entrenched in Western museum institutions that uphold white, male, racist and exclusive cultures, which you describe as white patriarchal culture. This culture shapes conservation discourses today. Several conservators working mainly in the academy have taken a stance outside these structures. And nonetheless conservation is still heavily influenced by the ways things are performed in museums, and how objects are displayed and kept within the museums. Can we engage with the concept of continuity in art, particularly in performance, without imposing our museological lens on it?

KM: A purposeful refusal is the answer. I think the field needs to learn how to see art for its own value to the people it serves, rather than the value the field wants to assign it. In the Black community, we sometimes say "you can be in it, but not of it." Meaning, we can be in museums while also rejecting a white patriarchal museological lens. But, it's hard to get new paradigms solidified within art museums. Again, think about how Fred Wilson's work, as much as it's referenced, didn't fundamentally shift curatorial approaches to historical collections. Thus, it has to be a conscious, purposeful refusal of white supremist "standards" and a deliberate adaption of diversity, equity and inclusion with the goal of becoming both a person and an institution that embodies these notions. People are approaching diversity, equity, inclusion as if they can just flip a switch and *voilà*, centuries of systemic oppression and erasure just vanish. No, it doesn't work that way. You must embody it, you've got to believe in it wholeheartedly, therefore you must *be* it.

HH: In one of your writings, you reference Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1993). Bennett argues that although museums are intended to educate the public and address an undifferentiated audience composed of free and equal individuals, their functioning as an instrument of public reform "in giving rise to the development of various technologies for regulating or screening ... has meant that they have functioned as a powerful means for differentiating populations."[9] Conservation is also intertwined in these relations. When we conduct artist interviews or audience research, we inadvertently perpetuate the established structures that are rooted in white supremacy. It is only recently that we have come to realize that the entire system, along with its underpinning values, is flawed.

KM: One of the reasons why I use Bennett is because he was one author who talks about these problems with that kind of depth in regard to class. In chapter one, a little paragraph confirmed that what I was thinking was not entirely crazy. I use that text in my classes a lot, because he delineates the class issue

and how museums really function to reinforce class hierarchies and how objects are also used to do that. Dan Hicks in his *The Brutish Museums* (2020)[10] addresses how objects carry out similar functions regarding race and colonization. The book is amazing.

HH: I agree and would like to add the insights of Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, particularly her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019). Azoulay calls on us to recognize the imperial foundations of knowledge and to reject its strictures and violence.[11] Returning to conservation, it's worth noting that old differentiations still persist, such as the distinction between the conservation of artworks and artifacts reflected in the specialist fields (e.g., ethnographic conservation is distinct from painting conservation which is distinct from furniture conservation). This distinction perpetuates certain values and structures that are no longer suitable for contemporary material culture and culture at large. I believe that the conservation of performance is best suited to address and act upon these old, deeply rooted but unscrutinized value systems and to instigate change by consciously addressing exclusion, systemic racism, elitisms.

KM: We are the generation that breaks down that elitism. Elitism has always been part-and-parcel of the curatorial field. There is a sense that the curator is the authority and I don't subscribe to this view at all. Which many of my institutions have found to be bizarre. Frankly, elitism is a type of performance that maintains the inequitable design of art museums. You are expected to do certain things as a curator. If I had a dime for every time somebody says to me, "Well, that's not what a curator does," I would be rich.

JPF: I don't want to fail to ask about your pedagogy and your new role at Tufts University. I'm sure that you have something to say about the role of education in making this change. And I'd like to ask about that in light of something that you said in an interview recently.[12] You said something that a lot of us have felt over the past few years: That you no longer necessarily believe that museums can be reformed and that they have to be torn down. But you said that as a person who is continuing to work in these systems and continuing to try to make change. I sometimes think that education, in the largest sense, is the most powerful space in which change can happen within an institution.

KM: Yeah, it took me a minute just to get there! Primarily, I thought we can't continue curating in this way. This goes back to something Hanna was saying earlier. Of course, I could reinstall the American collection and create a permanent collection plan, but then I realized, the problem is much deeper. Once I began to face adversity at Newfields that was basically a mirror reflection of the adversity I faced in Birmingham and at PAFA, I realized that the issue is the field, and more specifically the ways in which whiteness was constructed by it and functions within it.

I spent the majority of 2020 recovering from the PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], needing to heal from the Newfields situation.[13] All the while asking myself, what am I going to do? I am so fractured from the work that I have always loved to do. Not because I did anything wrong, but because a few powerful white folks didn't like it. But all the while, I was receiving invitations

to lecture about the problem. I was receiving calls, letters, texts, etc. from professionals field-wide who were telling me similar stories about their own experiences. People weren't just interested in my story; they were tired of being abused and discriminated against in museums and they were ready to do something about it. The more I lectured, the more me and my Newfields colleagues talked about it, I asked myself, how can I teach this? And as luck would have it, I received an email from Tufts, who were thinking about the issues of racial and social injustice in their own way.

So, to answer your question, Jules, I'm creating a graduate certificate program for working museum professionals in anti-racist curatorial practice. I'm designing a curriculum that will retrain museum professionals in the critical theory and cultural history that grounds colonization as the basis of museum existence, and the proliferation of whiteness as the basis of its functionality, which is often lacking in art history programs. Specifically, I'd like to help curators, museum educators, and other museum professionals build counter-hegemonic approaches to institutions. To do that, one has to know what white hegemony is, how it was established, and why. For instance, one of the first classes that students take in the program is called Art, Whiteness, and Empire, which looks at how art museums developed as repositories of colonialization. We ask questions like, what do imperialism and colonialization mean? How do we define racism and anti-racism? We study museum history, and particularly art museum history, as something that has been in service to the larger colonial project. We start with an attempt to gain understanding of how museums work, then how this understanding subsequently changes our approach to collections. One of the next classes, which focuses on curatorial approaches to collections, is called The Art of Dispossession, which asks, among other things, who owns cultural heritage? How did these institutions even get these works in the first place? What is our job or responsibility for caring for objects that do not technically belong to us? Is it about caring for the archive or is it about caring enough about the people from which the object hailed? Can we give an object back to its original context, or should we maintain the quality-of-care familiar from a Western standpoint?

We often hear the argument that African nations or Indigenous nations don't have the proper facilities for caring for ancient art objects. My thoughts are, if /when we return them, it is not our job to dictate what those nations do with them. If museums are so concerned about African nations not having a particular level of technology, invest the resources that are needed to care for the object. Or you could just respect that the nation knows how to care for its own cultural heritage. I think that sentiment demonstrates that Western museums literally don't know how to care about an object or its meaning to the places and people it represents because the field is designed primarily around capitalism and the object's relationship to whiteness. This is one of the foundational field principles the class will unpack.

HH: I'm intrigued by your idea of human being as an institution, and I wonder how our capacity to both care for objects and humans as carriers of

knowledge might prompt us to reconsider what ethical care or "caring for" really means. Your discussion of different models of ownership and different modes of owning of performance also caught my attention, particularly in the context of ownership over Black objects. Fred Moten's writings have been particularly insightful in exploring the persistence of the Black object.[14] I would love to hear your thoughts on the ideas of ownership in relation to performance within Black radical tradition.

KM: For us it's a communal ownership. Hip Hop is the best example. Although it became commercialized in the 1990s, in the late 1970s and '80s it was owned collectively, and it was for everybody. In the '80s, people debated whether or not Hip Hop started in the Bronx or in Queens. But there has always been a collective sense of ownership in Hip Hop, and I think that, in the Black community, jazz works in a similar way. It's not always about owning the physical thing. It is the essence that matters, and everybody should have equal access to that essence. You should feel something within you. It's easy to understand that sentiment with music. It's a little harder to apply it to performance. But, I think about the work of artists like Rashida Bumbray, whose work is very spiritual and has a kind of collective essence.[15] I think Sonya Clark's performative work does a similar thing.[16] And that's the point: the ways in which we can think about the essence of a work as belonging to everybody, instead of a singular work that belongs to a singular institution.

HH: I am curious how this concept could be applied to the evolving nature of institutions, specifically in relation to community involvement which plays such an important role in your work when you talk about art history. Your statement that "It's not about objects, it's about people" emphasizes the importance of the human factor in this field.

KM: Art history divorced people almost completely, and now that I'm coming at this from the lens of colonization, I understand the situation better. Although Raul Peck's *Exterminate All the Brutes* (2021)[17] is a hard documentary series to watch, it's true. White colonial powers literally tried to kill all the people and basically took all the stuff. So when considering colonization as the basis for museums, the people who created the objects can't exist if we're going to profit for generations off of the work. The problem is they didn't actually kill all the people. And I had never thought about it in that way before—divorcing certain peoples from the objects was necessary for the discipline and the market to maintain itself. We now have a lot of conversation about African and Indigenous works and how they got in these Western institutions. But have you noticed that conversations about Asian art within these contexts are interestingly missing?

JPF: Do you see a role for performance specifically in doing this work, in institutions or outside? Does performance possibly have a kind of revolutionary, or at least maybe a reforming or reconsidering, potential?

KM: I think it does. Performance pushes back and encourages us to think differently about ways in which ideas live. Performance is always different every time it is performed. It is about what we can lose every time the work is

reperformed. There's an ontology that should be considered in the curatorial philosophy as well as in the institutional approaches to collections.

HH: As we conclude our conversation, I have one final question for you: If you were to experience a piece of Black radical performance, what would be your ideal approach to staging the work? And, most importantly, how would you ensure the performance's continuity and attend to its afterlife?

KM: That's a good question. I think for me it would have to be something that completely dismantles institutions. It would be about interpersonal passing down. The way performance is conserved is that people continue to do it, no matter how it changes. So that we imbibe it. With each generation, or with each group of people that comes into the institution or reperforms it, the institution loses a little bit more of its traditional structures. This would happen gradually enough and would be something that would completely recreate the space. It's almost like peeling the paint off the walls.

This conversation was conducted in January 2022. Editorial assistance by Electra Maria Letizia D'Emilio. Our thanks to Rebecca Schneider for her initial suggestion.

Notes

1 See, for instance, Kelli Morgan, "To Bear Witness: Real Talk About White Supremacy Culture in Art Museums Today," *Indianapolis Recorder*, June 23, 2020, https://indianap olisrecorder.com/9a593596-b4b3-11ea-b6bd-23f712e03f32; Kelli Morgan, "It's Time for Museums to Take Critical Race Theory Seriously," *The Art Newspaper*, January 10, 2022, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/01/10/comment-or-its-time-for-museum s-to-take-critical-race-theory-seriously.
2 Valerie Cassel speaks about

> The idea of the black body in particular, [as being] so loaded and so complicated. There's no way to escape it… Endurance in this context suggests that you are pushing the body up to and beyond its limits in order to engage various discourses.

William S. Smith, "Valerie Cassel Olivier Talks Black Performance Art," *Art in America,* September 13, 2013. https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/va lerie-cassel-oliver-talks-black-performance-art-56220.
3 Valerie Cassel, *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary* Art (Houston: Contemporary Art Museum, 2013).
4 For the related book published on the occasion of Wilson's exhibition, see Lisa G. Corrin, ed. *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson* (Baltimore, MD: The Contemporary, in cooperation with the New Press, New York: 1994).
5 In July 2020 Morgan resigned from her position as curator at the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields after her efforts to address DEI issues, for which she was hired, were consistently thwarted. She charged in a letter to Charles Venable that Newfields was "consistently fail[ing] its BIPOC staff, allies and local communities and, as an institution, was 'toxic'." Dan Grossman, "Kelli Morgan's Response to the Newfields 30-day Action Plan," *NUVO*, March 21, 2021, https://nuvo.newsnirvana.com/equality_free dom/kelli-morgan-s-response-to-the-newfields-30-day-action-plan-the-entire-leadership -needs/article_64c3e406-8b10-11eb-b3ed-e7edb63b6115.html. On a related topic, see Morgan, "To Bear Witness."

6 bell hooks appeared twice on Charlie Rose's eponymous talk show for the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service, on February 24 and October 24, 1995.
7 Morgan, "To Bear Witness."
8 Morgan, "To Bear Witness."
9 Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).
10 Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).
11 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2019).
12 Julia Bernier, "An Interview with Kelli Morgan," *Black Perspectives*, blog of the African American Intellectual History Society, July 7, 2021. https://www.aaihs.org/an-interview-with-curator-kelli-morgan.
13 The museum has since faced further controversies about its approach to racism. Domenica Bongiovanni, "Curator Calls Newfields Culture Toxic, Discriminatory in Resignation Letter," *Indianapolis Star*, July 18, 2020, https://eu.indystar.com/story/entertainment/arts/2020/07/18/newfields-curator-says-discriminatory-workplace-toxic/5459574002; Morgan, "To Bear Witness."
14 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
15 Rashida Bumbray is a choreographer, curator and critic, and the Senior Program Manager of the Arts Exchange at The Open Society Foundations.
16 Sonya Clark works with topics related to diaspora and Afro-Caribbean traditions. By using simple objects such as human hair, combs or seed beads, the artist explores the many associations and stories that individuals create around things.
17 Raoul Peck's *Exterminate All the Brutes* is a documentary miniseries that discusses the history of colonization and genocide. The series is largely based on Sven Lindqvist's book *Exterminate All the Brutes: A Modern Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness* (1996), which, in turn, borrows the phrase from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

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10 Performing the "Mask"

Kongo Astronauts (Eléonore Hellio and Michel Ekeba) on postcolonial entanglements—A conversation with Hanna B. Hölling, Emilie Magnin and Valerian Maly. Introduction by Jacob Badcock

Writing in "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" Kodwo Eshun asks us to "imagine a team of African archaeologists from the future [...] excavating a site, a museum from their past: a museum whose ruined documents and leaking disks are identifiable as belonging to our present."[1] Kongo Astronauts, an artist collective founded in 2013 by the Kinshasa-based artists Eléonore Hellio and Michel Ekeba, are the image of the Afrofuturist archeologist *par excellence*. Kongo Astronauts are perhaps best known for their images of travel—the lone astronaut, dressed in a metallic suit plastered with digital detritus made from minerals mined in Democratic Republic of the Congo and subsequently returned to it in the form of technological waste. The costume painfully explicates the crises of extractive capitalism and environmental racism. Kongo Astronauts' multi-media practice includes photography, film, sculpture and performance, and engages with Kinshasa's alternative cultural network. In their creative practice, both the urban postcolonial pandemonium and the forces that have shaped the artists' immediate environment are intertwined with a critical lens, through which they assess human condition in contemporary Congo. Kongo Astronauts' work eludes easy classification: it is both ephemeral (their walks thought the urban landscape of Kinshasa) and tangibly material (the astronaut's suit). Their works respond to place and site and are processual and unstable. Although pointedly contemporary, Kongo Astronauts' performances speak to the *longue durée* history of rare-earth mineral extraction in West and West-Central Africa. Understanding this history goes some way to demonstrating the significance of their work for exploring postcolonial Congolese identity. Within the precolonial Kongo Kingdom (to which the Astronauts' name refers), precious and semi-precious metals such as copper and gold held spiritual, ritual and religious value as well as economic value. For example, copper manillas were used as currency, in the ritual performance and for the production of artworks. By contrast, the "calculative rationality" of the accumulation of African metals by European colonizers purely for their economic value created a divergence in access to capital, which underpins the continued European exploitation of African mineral resources today (for instance, in the indiscriminate mining of Congolese cobalt for the production of lithium-ion

batteries for use in mobile phones, laptops and electric vehicles).[2] Kongo Astronauts' work points to this economic divergence while also demonstrating an almost-utopic resistance to "the psychic ghettos that cover multiple post-colonial realities."[3] Their reconstitution of technological waste represents not only the physical conservation of and care for metals, but also the conservation of and care for a *metaphysical* Congolese relationship to metals which understands them as possessing more than economic value. Perhaps the most patent and enduring symbol of this Congolese metaphysics is the medieval symbol of the Kongo cosmogram, an ideographic representation of Congolese beliefs about the interconnection of the physical and the spiritual world. The Kongo cosmogram takes the form of a spiral divided by a straight line: in simple terms, the cosmogram represents the threshold between the worlds of the living and the dead, signifying a belief in the circularity and eternity of Being. This is a cosmology that seems to be retained by the Kongo Astronauts in their treatment of "dead" media. In their own words, Kongo Astronauts' works "manifest in the inter-zones of digital globalisation, where past, future, and present collide with the politics of intimacy and the realities of urban and rural life."[4] They conceive of their work as "polysemous fiction[s]" that allow us to "take a multidimensional look at different forms of exile and survival tactics."[5] The conservation of precolonial Congolese values and beliefs under the weight of colonial and neo-colonial economies of instrumental value seems to be one such "survival tactic." Once again, the image of the African astronaut-archeologist comes to mind. Eshun describes how, "sifting patiently through the rubble" of our present, the archeologist-astronaut would be "struck by how much Afro-diasporic subjectivity in the twentieth [and the twenty-first] century constituted itself through the cultural project of recovery." In the age of the astronaut-archeologist, writes Eshun, "memory is never lost. Only the art of forgetting."[6]

Hanna B. Hölling, Emilie Magnin and Valerian Maly met Kongo Astronauts to discuss the postcolonial entanglements in which their Afrofuturist "project of recovery" is situated and how they think about the continuity of materials and meanings, and performance and practice: How do astronaut-archeologists remember?

Hanna Hölling: Eléonore and Michel, it's such a pleasure to be able to speak with you. We are excited to explore the ideas underpinning the creative practice of Kongo Astronauts, particularly those relating to life, afterlife and the preservation of your oeuvre. To begin, could you tell us how your collective came together, as well as whether the arrival of the astronauts has already occurred, or is still in progress?

Kongo Astronauts/Eléonore Hellio: The history of Kongo Astronauts is associated with various layers of my prior experience with a Congolese network of artists that emerged in DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo] in the beginning of 2000. Faustin Linyekula, then an up-and-coming choreographer and dancer, is the first person I met from DRC.[7] I invited him to collaborate on several collective performances using videosonic systems to connect different spaces. At the time, I was teaching at HEAR, the Strasbourg school of art, in the experimental group I had co-created, called "out-of-format art." In 2006, I

was invited for the first time to Kinshasa to participate in "Scenographies Urbaines," initiated locally by "Eza Possible," a collective of students from the School of Arts of Kinshasa, who had invited artists from the continent and from Europe to open up the academic program of their school to new practices. They were protesting the unacceptance of transdisciplinarity and artmaking involving mixed media, video, performance or installation. For instance, the students created large-scale installations from cars that had been burned during conflicts in Kinshasa and accompanied that with spontaneous performances. This action led to a partnership between the art school in Strasbourg and the School of Arts of Kinshasa, which enabled about 60 Congolese and French teachers and students to travel back and forth between the two countries. This unique project, in which I was deeply involved, enabled the sharing of knowledge and cultivation of otherness in the foreground of historical frictions and postcolonialities. This exchange opened up a new creative era—if not a movement—between Kinshasa and Strasbourg. Issues concerning decolonization were addressed in both schools, probably for the first time. In 2008, when I continued teaching both in France and in DRC, I co-founded a collective called MOWOSO. "Mowoso" signifies the sound made by the wind through the leaves of a tree. Bebson Elemba (aka Bebson de la Rue), who is a prolific artist and musician from Ngwaka, a very rough neighborhood in Kinshasa, was a key person in this project.[8] MOWOSO can be seen as the continuity of Bebson's informal school of the arts (and life), "Ghetto KoTa OKoLa," which means literally "GeT In-GrOw Up!", through which so many artists, dancers and musicians got inspired. To me, it was a continuity of "out-of-format art." MOWOSO didn't last long but remains embodied in three important moments: the making of a film titled *Ground Overground Underground* (2010),[9] the showing of that film at Afropolis, a 2010 exhibition on African cities curated by Christian Hanussek and Kerstin Pinther, and a text on the failure of MOWOSO, authored by Dominique Malaquais, which I asked her to write.[10]

Around 2012, I met Michel Ekeba and we both participated in a residency at the Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg. Day and night we walked the South African city, having engaging discussions with people involved in the fight against Apartheid. During the day, Michel dressed like a robot and we would ask people to imagine the Johannesburg of the future. When back in Kinshasa, I was asked to be associate artistic director for an internet and cable TV launch that was organized in a very fancy location with a swimming pool. It was a job. Michel and I decided that he would create an astronaut costume with a tiny camera on his helmet that would broadcast his interaction with the audience… This story is told in the book *Écologies du smartphone* (2022).[11]

Shortly thereafter, I needed to return to France, while Michel continued to study at the School of Arts of Kinshasa and began to be plagued by boredom. So, he decided to wear the astronaut costume, and, in an almost nostalgic way, walk in the costume through Kinshasa. He sought a new space for him to exist in, a space within this costume. He quickly found that the costume attracted people, and started to use it to meet new people, and thus to continue his

artistic work in this way. At the beginning his walks were spontaneous and did not follow any strategy, but soon, they became a tactic of survival.

Shouldering his heavy suit built with old computer parts, Michel, the astronaut, carried an awareness of the suit's entangled material politics—these very minerals make many contemporary technologies work yet simultaneously fuel much of the violent conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, not to mention ecological disasters. Michel's performance allowed him to transmute this negative and violent energy, linked to the extraction of precious minerals such as coltan,[12] into a human energy. The astronaut's performance is a way to reclaim the extracted energy and to claim life over these materials. The performance also serves to attract attention and empower himself in this megalopolis, in which one can feel overwhelmed, out of place, in exile. The suit of the astronaut was a way out of this hostile environment—hostile not only in this present moment but also across time, including the colonial era and the later dictatorships. So, Kongo Astronauts think through and deal with the unbearable and reflect what has been happening in the minds of people across the country.

When Michel commenced his walks in the streets, these served as means not only to encounter ordinary people but also to interact with travelers. With his suit on, he would emerge like an alien in the neighborhood where some Europeans—often artists, producers, and curators—came to hang out. He would activate what we call *matolo*—a way to engage people, draw their attention, and perhaps even get invited for lunch, or be given a beer or a pack of cigarettes. It was an opportunity to exchange ideas about the world. Unlike many Westerners, Congolese rarely get opportunities to travel, let alone the necessary clearances. It is difficult to get a visa out of Congo. Michel, a victim of economic inequality like most of the population in Congo, dreamt of *Mikili*, which means "other worlds" in Lingala—the Western world, which is, in people's minds, imagined and idealized, with lasting consequences for Congolese society.

HH: Could you tell us more about the meaning of *matolo*?

Kongo Astronauts/Michel Ekeba: The basis of our survival tactics—which also have an artistic function—is to overcome socio-political difficulties, to harmonize with the system without advocating for it or doing it silently. "Matolo" is to ask for support intelligently, without making it appear that you are asking. But there are different categories of *matolo*: You can write a letter to associations or companies; you can ask the family to support a project; and kids on the streets do *matolo* by flattering someone. *Matolo* can be automatic: you just look into someone's eyes, and they understand. It's the connection, the energy, the person you're meeting and the atmosphere you're in. *Matolo* is practiced by rich people, too. "Mind" is something related to *matolo*, it is an evolving concept often used by artists. But unlike *matolo*, *mind* requires reflection, it is not spontaneous. I have to consider, "What am I going to do to get this?" It always starts with a reflection that leads to solutions that can be intellectual, physical, or psychological solutions, and that includes a sense of expediency, which is widespread in Kinshasa and in Congo. There is also a void, there is a suspense. It's the connections, it's the interactions between the

person asking and the person receiving. This is also an art form. It's thinking in harmony with your body, your mind and your energy to achieve a thoughtful project, a materialized thought. It's putting your reflective thoughts into action.

KA/EH: In our work together as Kongo Astronauts, we question the many impacts of mining the earth and beyond, on these quests for mining infinity endlessly. Thinkers, artists, innovators from Africa have to propose their vision of the future and not only be consumers or, worse, casualties, as was and is so often the case. The performance of the astronaut is also a way to adapt to a globalized, fast-changing world, and to find an equilibrium between resistance and assimilation. Lastly, the astronaut's performances address the Earth's condition and ecology. They demonstrate the obscene gaps between the North and the South.

The figure of the astronaut can be seen as a contemporary mask. In Congolese traditions, the mask is conceived as a school for sharing knowledge and experience. The mask thus questions the current political, social, and economic status quo in Congolese society, and it questions Congolese identity. However, it is important to realize that the term "identity" is not used in day-to-day discussions—the self-reflection that this notion requires is mainly centered around the interaction with the Western world.

HH: Who are "Kongo Astronauts" and how many are they?

KA/ME: Kongo Astronauts are comprised of multiple personalities. It's us, Bebson, and other passengers—people who needed some guidance, such as, sometimes, young artists for whom our collective has been a rite of passage. So there are multiple selves, and we don't represent any permanent position. We navigate within many contradictions. We have systemic, evolving personae that sometimes reflect personal psychosocial conditions, and sometimes the politics of our intimate lives, which we try to connect to a wider societal context. We are made up of our different selves and are of different genders, origins and social backgrounds.

Valerian Maly: Eléonore, is your personal story of coming to Kinshasa also the story of the creation of the collective, Kongo Astronauts?

KA/EH: Kongo Astronauts was a state of "mind." Bebson, who might be hailed as the John Cage of Kinshasa, has been a key person in Kongo Astronauts. Like us, he blended art and life. Michel spends a lot of time with Bebson and sometimes stays overnight at his house. I too have listened to him for days, speaking in metaphors and proverbs, continuously reinventing language through shared intelligence, by mixing French, English, Lingala and the coded language "Langila." Through Bebson, we have established strong alliances with local art, dance and music, and there are further associations with the emergence of hip hop, rap, ragamuffin and what we call urban music today in Kinshasa.[13] These synergies started to contaminate other artists, who similarly started to build costumes and walk around the city. The KINACT festival and other collectives are the manifestation of this.

Emilie Magnin: I'm interested in the idea of the "collective self" and the "contamination" of other people—the impact the astronaut has on others.

KA/ME: At the beginning, we organized several performances without expecting anything in return. That dispersed the work. The work was a commitment as well as an amusement and a contribution. And then things changed. The work took on a form—thanks to people like you, curators and researchers—it started to have a meaning that I myself had not perceived initially. And that opened other doors for reflection. I think that's why we're here. The idea of the "mind" is related to the idea of "contamination."

KA/EH: Kongo Astronauts' performances and our ideas inspired other artists who were searching for a form of expression, so they often used our visibility and the attention created around our performances. This spawned debates: What is it that we are doing? How are our performances linked to ancestral practices? How are they linked to contemporary performances and the art market?

Filmmakers and photographers arrived in Kinshasa eager to take photographs of Kongo Astronauts; clips were produced for different media. For Michel, while I was in France, it was a way of survival and development of the concept. But at a certain moment, the filming and video recording got out of our hands, and thus we decided to produce our own films and photography. At times, people would film Michel and fail to inform him or ask permission. The work become mediatized without us having any agency or control over it. Many would fail to acknowledge Kongo Astronauts. When I would draw attention to the fact that this persona was a co-creation based on a collective experience and vision, many Europeans were reluctant to acknowledge that a white person was involved, arguing that the work wouldn't sell as well. It's another form of paradoxical discrimination—discrimination against a white person by another white person. Many Europeans who come to Kinshasa often behave as explorers who are discovering art emerging out of chaos, out of nothing. This is problematic because it overlooks our own background in art education and a rich tradition of ancestral and artistic practice here. Furthermore, Kongo Astronauts is like an underground network that connects the roots of different trees, each with its own voice and perception, autonomous but sharing the multiple splinters of the world within its many levels of entanglement.

HH: How did you approach the filmmaking and documenting of Kongo Astronauts' performances?

KA/EH: In my early years in Kinshasa I felt like a voyeur and was uncomfortable with filming people. Later, I began to carry the camera everywhere I went, and have since filmed numerous performances, people and spaces. Initially, the main subject of my filming was Bebson, because he touched me, and we spent a lot of time together as friends. At times, Bebson wanted to be filmed; at times, I filmed the spontaneous performances that emerged because we were sitting in his ghetto while it was raining, and we were bored. People joined in, Bebson would start to do some chores or cleaning or make deals with neighbors, and I simply filmed what was happening.

HH: Let's discuss the astronaut's performance and attire, specifically their suit. What materials are used to make it, and what is the experience of wearing it like?

KA/ME: The costume is very heavy. When I walk, jump and climb, I'm sweating—it can be 30, 40, 50 degrees inside the costume. During one evening of performance, I often lose 5 to 10 kilograms. It's a great challenge to control the movement and the pain. So, I drink alcohol, and enter a state of trance. And for me that's what gives meaning to the performance: there is pain, there is the cry of someone, and there is my resistance to it.

KA/EH: The performance involves hard, physical work performed under the heat of the sun. Michel is often stimulated to the extent that he enters a state of altered consciousness. In it, he transcends the heaviness both of the suit and of the social conditions. The performance has a spiritual meaning for Michel. He sees it as a type of ritual which might be associated, even if remotely, with traditional rite of passage ceremonies. I see it as a way to balance senses of resilience and resistance.

Also, the suit constrains the astronaut's vision. As the astronaut walks through the street of a village or through a forest, he's almost like a blind person. Often, it is the sound of the city or the forest that the astronaut connects with. His vision becomes internal. The suit is also acoustically rich. When the astronaut walks around, the costume produces a lot of noise, which is combined with the sound of Michel's breath. This affects his interactions with people he encounters. Some of these people ask him questions, some simply follow him.

KA/ME: The performances have rarely taken place in art spaces, but often in the streets of Kinshasa. I adapt my presence to who is there to interact with me; performing at an art event with rich people is not the same as being in one of the neighborhoods of my city.

EM: Could you tell us about the condition the costumes are in after they have been used in performance, and are the costumes preserved in their physical form?

KA/ME: Because the costume is used in a performance, it often falls apart and even gets damaged. It depends on the environment, the actions and the movements that you're going to make in the performance. If I perform for the elite, the upper crust, it's all about appearance and beauty, in an exaggerated way that is almost provocative. I'm not going to jump on the tables and break my suit, you know. I'm adapting, I'm changing the atmosphere according to the context of the audience. But in the context of a street performance, I might jump into dirty puddles, disrupt traffic or let myself fall off the bank of a river. I challenge my body until the suit almost completely breaks apart.

KA/EH: A river where you almost drowned! While the idea of restoring the same suit endlessly interested us at first, we kept on adding new parts to the suits, replacing the parts that got damaged in the course of the performance. We make the suit shine and "alive" again. Interestingly, it is often only the external parts that get replaced or are polished, but the inner part of the suit keeps the patina and the traces of use—the sweat and blood from the abrasions that emerged while performing in it.

HH: I'm intrigued by the notion of the audience in the astronaut's performances. You mentioned that when Michel wears the suit, he elicits reactions and people tend to follow him. However, I'm curious if you have a particular

audience in mind, or if the notion of an audience, within the context of your work's openness, is superfluous?

KA/EH: Initially, the astronaut performed at a VIP event in Kinshasa for which I had also proposed other artists. Followed by spontaneous performances in the streets where he did what he usually does: walks in the city, talks with people, finds places, has a drink. Perhaps he also makes deals, because that's also how people survive in Kinshasa. You go out and you hope to get lucky and find something that will materialize as a day job. Most artists *vivent au taux du jour* ([literally "live by the day's rate"]).

The audience depends on where the performance takes place—it is often passers-by, workers or local inhabitants. There have been instances where the astronaut's actions have seemed a performance for himself, a surpassing of himself. In this context, it's also interesting to think about other artists as audience, too. Kongo Astronauts is also an artist's artist giving living testimony of past, present and future.

VM: Could you tell us a little bit more about the costume, who is involved in its fabrication?

KA/EH: Michel and I make the astronaut's costumes. Sometimes, Bebson and other artists collaborate with us in our creation by providing interesting found materials. But Michel really is the master of the costume. In the beginning of our collaboration, he created the first one and then several subsequent ones. My role was to propose a concept relating to our many discussions and make suggestions on details. I often intervene on the helmets. So far, there have been several different costumes, approximately six or seven. It is difficult to tell because sometimes, as I said, we reconstruct a damaged costume, or construct a new one using pieces of the former one. One could say that there is no fixed materiality to the costume; the costume evolves with time and use.

EM: Do you and Michel wish to preserve these costumes for the future? It's a tricky question since it seems that the very logic beyond the function of the astronaut's costume is to subject it to wear and tear, to the use in the action it is designed to co-perform. Asking this question, I'm obviously implying here a Western notion of conservation, in which preservation is often associated with the upkeep of the material integrity of a work. What would be the alternative way of preserving the costume, and how could the costume be remembered? And, finally, is the costume "collectible," in the Western sense?

KA/EH: Some years back, after discovering that one of our suits had sold on the secondary market without our consent, we contemplated for the first time sales of costumes that had not been used in performance. Our preference, however, is for the costume to have a life, to take part in performance, with which it is inextricably bound, before it ends up on display. On the other hand, of course, we cannot escape the fact that bringing these costumes to the art market will help us survive and continue our work, so it's an ongoing dilemma. To be radical in Kinshasa is a luxury that Michel, I, and others cannot afford. We also followed the advice of our friend, the French scholar Dominique Malaquais, with whom we have had an intensive relationship and who has

followed our work for several years.[14] She recommended that, rather than working freestyle, we find a gallery who would represent our work. We established a collaboration with New York-based Axis Gallery, with whom our friend Sammy Baloji, an established Congolese artist, has had a fruitful relationship. We started our collaboration with Axis Gallery just at the beginning of the pandemic, so things were slowed down by the global lockdown. Since working with Axis, we've opened up to preserving our work in an object-form. Particular costumes have been presented in art exhibition contexts, including Entrelacs/Interlaced, honoring Dominique Malaquais, at Cité internationale des arts in Paris, and in our first solo exhibition in the United States, as well as at international art fairs, and have been acquired by art collections.

We have thought about the fate of our costumes a lot. After the performance, we could choose to leave them as they are—a relic from the performance that could potentially be sold. Michel and I have discussed it extensively, and we understand that the costume needs to be a sort of warning light that continues to shine and travels on to different spaces.

VM: Could you elaborate on the aspect of film and photographs being modes of preserving the astronaut's performances? What are potential other ways of preservation, remembrance or afterlife of your performances that you envision?

KA/EH: I would say there are several ways. One is our relationship with Dominique and the network of researchers that write about our work, and that have in a way used our work in research. For us, this relationship with the research world has been very interesting and important because the questions and the constant interviews help us define ourselves. Discussing with scholars directs us to various aspects of our work because they formulate questions that we wouldn't have considered ourselves. We often don't have time for this kind of thinking or are overwhelmed by the strategies of sheer survival. It's been stimulating for us to maintain this exchange and to share knowledge across borders, and to have our work preserved and remembered through research.

Photography accompanies our performance and filmmaking but it's important to underscore that it isn't the most important aspect of our work in comparison to performance and film; photography helps us understand what we do, to delve into our psyche, to frame a reality that escapes us, to leave a trace. It also helps us to share what we do in an immediate way because it crosses continents very easily, much faster than text, films and performance. We started photographing because we were tired of people photographing our work and making money off of it. We were determined to make it our own. Our photography was met with great interest. We often take photographs on the sites where our performances and films happen. A further layer of meaning was added by the photocollages we produced.

At times, text offers another layer through which our work is preserved. Both Michel and I write. These are different forms of intertextuality, sometimes theoretical, sometimes poetic. Sometimes our texts express the overlap of languages in DRC and their translatability. We try to contextualize the spoken, street language—French and Congolese local formulations—in order to understand them.

The films, too, are a very important way of preserving our performance. Sometimes, performances are made in order to be filmed, sometimes their duration extends the recording time. The films are important because they often involve other artists and people. We rarely hire people in the sense of casting them but rather work with people we know well, with whom we've shared moments of our lives, or with people who want to collaborate with us.

For us who live in and with the city and not in a protective tower, the city is very important. Life here is an ongoing performance. We have plenty of intense interactions. Here, we speak to each other in taxis, in buses, in the market, and everyone negotiates their rights and interests all the time. This negotiation can take a subtle form but it also can be seductive, flattering or confrontational. Of course, there are administrative rules but everything is negotiable, so one negotiates all the time. The people I collaborate with in my films are people who have built tactics of survival that are based on these ongoing negotiations.

HH: I appreciate how you have touched upon the subject of preservation. In connection with this topic, I would like to revisit the subject of costumes for a moment. It seems that the act of remaking or regenerating the costumes can also be viewed as a form of care for your practice—a preservation that is not just limited to maintaining the initial materials, but is also linked with the preservation of the form, and with the performance of this form. Additionally, the costumes embody pressing environmental issues since they are collages, repositories and assemblages of discarded material—the waste products extracted from the digestive system of technological progress. As symbols of extractive capitalism and environmental violence, the electronic waste—the "dead media"—are now given new life and are carried into the world, engulfing Michel's body. Yet, this body is triumphant, rather than subjugated. The physical composition of the astronaut's costume is a manifestation of the circulation of matter: The components of old electronics created from materials excavated from Africa's mineral-rich grounds, transformed into consumer electronic for the pleasures of the Western world, and then brought back to their origins as a toxic "gift." Although discarded here, they have not been forgotten—picked up and recirculated into the secondhand market of electronic parts. The costume, therefore, is not only a radical mode of preservation, but also an invocation of the ongoing "mattering" of matter, in the political, economic and social sense.

KA/ME: The electronic parts, the circuit boards of the Kongo Astronaut's suit are sold in bulk at the market. I buy them there, I don't pick them up because you can't find them. There is a market of resellers of electronic parts where you can buy diodes and all the other small parts used to repair stuff, all in good condition. Kongo Astronauts' work addresses the exploitation and conservation of minerals and ores in Congo. By creating the suits in gold and silver, we make a link to these natural resources and all the wealth that exists in the country. There is an unlimited connection between matter and creation. An old phone comes back to the place from which the resources originated. To create a costume is to participate in the never-ending process of extraction, exploitation, fabrication, destruction, reconstruction, transformation…

Figure 10.1 Kongo Astronauts, *Untitled [-5]*, 2021, Series: SCrashed_Capital.exe. Fine art Baryta paper. Courtesy: Kongo Astronauts and Axis Gallery.

KA/EH: This practice of using recycled materials is also characteristic of DRC. As an example, having grown up in Mbandaka, in the equatorial region of Congo, Bebson is very knowledgeable about traditional musical instruments used in that region. When he moved to the capital, he didn't have access to these instruments, but he had their sounds and shapes in his memory. He didn't have the money to buy modern instruments imported from Europe, America or Asia. So street children supplied him with found materials gathered in the streets—broken objects like kitchen utensils, electronic toys, sound systems, car parts, etcetera. Bebson mastered the DIY philosophy and recreated all the sounds he grew up with, including the wind blowing between the trees in the forest or the hatching of a thousand caterpillars… mixing it with new sounds made of industrial waste.

But Bebson doesn't keep things, he feels he needs to continuously rebuild the world and reconfigure his dreams. If something breaks, he makes something else. He doesn't emphasize preservation. His idea of preservation is embodied in the school that he created in the neighborhood: "If you don't have money, create an instrument with whatever you have at hand." It's an ongoing bricolage. And Bebson's creations are difficult to preserve since they are made with whatever is at hand at the given time and last a limited time. I feel a very strong affinity with Bebson, but maybe for you it's different, Michel?

KA/ME: Well, Bebson inspired many artists, and I was inspired by Bebson in the way he makes things out of anything. But I wanted to keep, not destroy what I had built. Like a musician, who is inspired, and who takes a melody and

changes it. Bebson is a part of us, a spirit to which we dance. For me, Kongo Astronauts has allowed me to reconstruct myself. In it, I preserve the gems of my land. The costume allows me to preserve the knowledge and to preserve who I am. It's a form of identity.

HH: Does the costume preserve a longer tradition, or does it link to ancestral practice?

KA/EH: The reason why the movement of creating costumes in Kinshasa took off is because the Congolese understand the role of the costume as a vehicle during ritual events—such as the birth of a baby or someone's death. This history is deeply rooted, despite being forcefully shut off during the colonial era, and later re-encouraged under the promotion of the concept of "authenticity" espoused by Mobutu's dictatorship.[15] Historical traditions have also been shut off by the church who claims to this day that these practices are sorcery or "fetish." For us it is also a way to address decolonization issues. Somewhere, deep down, Bebson, Michel, and others have found ways to re-enact ancestral practices, using the materials they have at their disposal. Despite the suppression of culture, mineral extraction and the dumping of Western garbage on Congolese grounds, the artists reappropriate these materials and make them visible on their bodies—they transform them into aesthetic embodiments to not only question the impact of globalization but also as a way to unlock memory, to heal, reclaim and reinvent their lives.

Figure 10.2 Kongo Astronauts, *The jungle is my church 1*, 2015. Series: Lusanga "ex:Leverville." Fine art Baryta paper. Courtesy: Kongo Astronauts and Axis Gallery.

Figure 10.3 Kongo Astronauts, *Aisle of Dreams*, 2019. Series: After Schengen. Fine art Baryta paper. Courtesy: Kongo Astronauts and Axis Gallery.

HH: That's an incredibly powerful act. I am curious, do you find that wearing the suit connects to traditional Congolese culture and rituals? Could the ritual you perform be interpreted as a continuation of a much older tradition? Is this mode of expression a form of invention or reinvention of the past?

KA/ME: Yes, indeed, my putting on the suit and going out to walk the streets is a form of ritual. I often think of Zebola in my performances. Zebola is a traditional African possession ritual to heal mental illnesses. Another link with the past is the "K" in our name, Kongo Astronauts, which links us with the historic Kongo Kingdom. And even in the design of the Astronauts' masks, there is a touch of tradition: they remind us of the function of African masks, updated for our current time. The performances of Kongo Astronauts today in the city reveal a history and richness that you can see only in the eyes of onlookers. I believe that when people look at the costume of Kongo Astronauts, it represents for them a mirror of a forgotten society, it represents a mirror of what they are but they cannot grasp. It is like someone who sees himself in a mirror, who does not recognize that it is him, yet it is. The costume is also inspired by traditional sculptures that had a psychological or protective function—a function that gives hope and protects and also immortalizes something. The sculpture can be both static and in motion.

KA/EH: All these costumes that have been appearing in the urban fabric of Kinshasa assess potential new social functions in the continuity of precolonial art—to teach, to protect and to immortalize.

HH: Continuing our discussion on the topic of transmission, you previously suggested that the astronaut can be perceived both as a contemporary mask and as a means of sharing knowledge and experience. On another occasion, you see individuals such as Bebson are engaged with hip-hop and urban culture which rely on oral transmission. Can you expand on this further and explain how the astronaut figure is able to transmit knowledge through this form of borrowing?

KA/EH: Bebson is set up in his neighborhood, he has always lived in the same house. Most people interested in performance visit his house, some of them staying all day long and watching how he builds instruments and costumes. Sometimes he wears costumes and does spontaneous performances with those visitors. He helped many individuals who wished to become artists, and many artists who were conflicted about studying at the School of Arts or simply did not have the financial means to do so.

In these informal meetings of his "Ghetto GeT In-GrOw Up!"," lots of things take place through emulation. No master classes are provided, no lectures given. These informal gatherings accompany youths during their search for a meaningful activity in a context of extended unemployment. The visitors to Bebson's house are encouraged to recall individual or collective memories, to research the stories and knowledge of their families, and they receive support in translating these stories and knowledge into their work. All this is organic, it is a form of human ecology. We worked in the same frame of mind with our space walker.

As for our films, they are not written in advance, anyone who is involved can influence the course of the film during the shooting. The films are often created in extensive timeframes that are sometimes shown unfinished and have evolving versions as life takes them over. They are almost endlessly remixable. The writing and rewriting take place during editing when a vision starts to emerge portraying the processes, improvisation and interactions that occurred during filming, the understanding and unfolding of intimate relationships with people and space and the capacity to integrate polysemy into something powerful that evolves at the pace of our understanding.

Though we have not focused on the preservation of our own creative works, what is preserved is a transmission of knowledge, a continuity of practice, enacted using an additive process of assemblage created from garbage—cross-temporal masks—which manifest in the creations of others. Bebson, Kongo Astronauts and a few others like Pisco Crane from "Fulu Miziki" or Eddy Ekete from "Ndaku, la vie est belle" engage people with these costumes, they communicate how to employ costumes to express their personal, social, economic, environmental concerns, and how to harness the use of garbage to demonstrate problems arising from Congo's violent histories and troubled present.

Notes

1 Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003): 287–302.
2 The macroeconomics of European capital accumulation through the importation of Congolese copper is spelled out in Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to The Age of Revolution* (London: Penguin Random House, 2020), see chapter 5, "The Kingdom of Kongo: From Majesty to Revolt."
3 "Kongo Astronauts," Axis Gallery website, https://axis.gallery/kongo-astronauts-bio-cv, accessed February 14, 2022.
4 "Kongo Astronauts," Axis Gallery website.
5 "Kongo Astronauts," Axis Gallery website.
6 Eshun, "Further Considerations."
7 Faustin Linyekula is a Congolese dancer and choreographer of contemporary dance whose works often address the experience of war, fear and economic collapse.
8 Bebson Elemba's musical performance concludes Kongo Astronaut's film *Transpatial Incidents*, directed by Eléonore Hellio, 2010/2020.
9 MOWOSO, "Ground/Overground/Underground," https://chimurengachronic.co.za/ground-overground-underground, accessed March 5, 2022.
10 Dominique Malaquais, "On the Urban Condition at the Edge of the Twenty-first-century: Time, Space and Art in Question," *Social Dynamics* 44, no. 3 (2018): 425–437.
11 Laurence Allard, Alexandre Monnin and Nicolas Nova, *Écologies du smartphone* (Lormont: Le Bord de l'eau, 2022).
12 Coltan is a rare raw material, a dull black metallic ore from which the elements niobium and tantalum are extracted. Coltan is indispensable to the production of mobile phones, and the DRC is the world's second-largest supplier of this mineral. Coltan mines are often located in the conflict zones, and workers are subject to human rights abuses. Since January 2021, the European Union requires companies to ensure that so-called "conflict minerals" are sourced responsibly.
13 Raggamuffin, often abbreviated as ragga, is a subgenre of dancehall and reggae music in which sampling plays a prominent role. The instrumentals primarily consist of electronic music.
14 The research for this interview was informed by Dominique Malaquais's writings. See, for instance, Malaquais, "Kongo Astronauts Embedded Collective," *Multitudes* 77, no. 4 (2019): 20–26 and "Anti-Pathos," *African Arts* 53, no. 3 (2020): 1–7.
15 Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga (1930–97) was a Congolese politician and president of the DRC who pursued a recourse to traditional values.

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Part III

Living conservation

11 Knowledge has to live

Dread Scott on *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* (2019)—A conversation with Jules Pelta Feldman

Visual artist Dread Scott describes his practice as "revolutionary art to propel history forward." His career was launched with his student installation *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?* (1988), which caused a nationwide controversy the following year—and demonstrated, to him, the power of blurring the lines between audience and participant. For *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* (2019), Scott led hundreds of participants in restaging the German Coast Uprising of 1811, the largest rebellion of enslaved people in the history of the United States. This uprising is significant for its utopian ambitions: Not only seeking their own freedom, the rebels, led by Charles Deslondes, planned to claim an independent, free territory. For Scott, this amounts to an ambition to end slavery itself. Today, this remarkable event has largely been forgotten—partly due to efforts made at the time to deny how thoroughly the rebels threatened and destabilized white landowners, and how close they came to achieving freedom. Scott's engagement with reenactment is thus also an attempt to imagine the implications of an alternate history in which this plan had succeeded in founding an independent Black territory. Following the three-day journey of the rebels, Scott's "army of the enslaved" marched for two days along the Mississippi River towards New Orleans. Unlike the original uprising, however, which was brutally crushed before it reached the city, the reenactors celebrated a successful conclusion in New Orleans's Congo Square, where the roots of jazz may be traced, and which thus bears witness to the enduring centrality of Black contributions to American culture. And while the reenactors wore period costumes and held muskets, the diverse neighborhoods of their 2019 route included "Cancer Alley," a stretch of land along the Mississippi between Baton Rouge and New Orleans known for its preponderance of petrochemical refineries, the pollution from which has disproportionately harmed communities of color. *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* is therefore not intended as a precise recreation of historic events, but rather an exercise in bringing the lessons of the past to bear on the politics of the present. In the below conversation, Scott reflects on the limits and potential of preservation, the collaborative nature of the project, and about historical reenactment's potential to change the future.

Figure 11.1 Dread Scott, *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* Performance Still 1, 2020. Photographer: Soul Brother.

Jules Pelta Feldman: I'd like to begin by asking: Are you thinking about the conservation of your performance works?

Dread Scott: *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* is inherently an ephemeral, community-engaged project, and that's—partially—something I really like. There's no way to encompass all of it. In fact, there's no one person that knew everything that happened, and that was by design. Not even me. I probably knew more than any other individual, but there was way more of the project that I didn't know than I did. I thought about the question of preserving it from the beginning. And while I think we've done okay in some aspects of it, there are some things we didn't have the funding and infrastructure to do. I'm arrogant enough to think that this performance is really important and that people will look back at it at some point and want to think about how this happened, what it was. And there's an aspect of it that exists in the heads of 350-plus people. That is a unique experience, and that is not encompassable, not intended to be fixed in time. How they embody the spirit of freedom and emancipation that was at the heart of the project is an ongoing, living and dynamic thing, and you can't preserve that in a certain sense. At the time, monuments were being taken down and people were thinking about: What do you preserve from the past, regardless of whether it's good or bad? The way knowledge and history—but also art—gets preserved and is meaningful, is that it has to live. So all the people in the army of the enslaved that participated in the project are continuing the project in some way. The preservation is the act of doing. That's one element.

But then there's the ephemera. I wanted to—and I still want to, but I don't know whether it will ever happen—I really wanted to get every scrap of paper, every email conversation, every correspondence, notes that I took from meetings by the organizing teams… I wanted to get all of that collected and gathered in one place, and I wanted to have that donated to an archive, like, say, the Amistad archive, or someplace else.[1] The Smithsonian has an archive that preserves not only fine art, but also other materials. I don't know whether it will ever happen.

The core of the project was an organization called Antenna, which is a small arts organization. The people that were there when I was doing the project largely aren't there anymore. I don't even know who has access to the Google Drive that holds a lot of this information. But at some point somebody's going to say, "What's this?" and hit delete. Even the digital assets were not archived, let alone the notes, the other things. There weren't enough interviews done with people that participated—to ask them what this experience was, and then get that down in one place. I've done okay with the stuff that I have, but really, it's the bare minimum. I haven't thrown it away. It's in a box—an acid-free box, but it's a box.

There's probably about 80 costumes in a storage locker someplace in New Orleans, that was moved from one place to another place. Again, it's controlled by Antenna. The people have changed. The executive director's left, the person who was the assistant project manager has left. The project manager was just contracted. I literally don't know who's paying for that storage locker. And at a certain point, they're going to have a budget crunch and they're going to say, "We can't afford to maintain this." So, there are things that should be preserved, but we literally don't have the funding and the infrastructure to do it. If we had just a little bit more funding and a little bit more time, I'm sure there's an archive that would take it. And with each day, you know—one flood, one budget constraint, one institutional memory loss. If I die tomorrow—it could happen—that's all gone. The question you asked is, have I thought about preservation—well, yeah, I've thought about it, but the thinking doesn't necessarily equal doing anything to make sure that this could be useful to future researchers, scholars, artists. To make sure it exists, let alone whether it's accessible.

JPF: It's clear that you were thinking about this from the start as history.

DS: As an artist, I'm trained to think about history. It's not always at the forefront of my mind, but I think most artists want our work to be remembered—somehow, somewhere. Whether you say, "I don't care about the mainstream art world, I want to just be part of community-engaged stuff—I want the activists to remember me." Or, "Hey, I could give a fuck about activists, I really want that MoMA retrospective, and I want that big, juicy catalog." Whatever you want, you're spending time on the planet and you're contributing to some discourse, and you want that to be memorialized in some way, or multiple ways. And because I'm not Marina Abramović or Kara Walker, I don't have a whole army of gallerists and other people that are taking care of that. So it falls on me, with the limited resources and time and attention I have.

JPF: But unlike Marina Abramović or Kara Walker, you did have your own army.

DS: That's true! I did have an army. It's true in a joking sense, but also in the most important sense of the legacy of the work. I talk with some of the people that were in the army of the enslaved on occasion. I became friends with some people I didn't know, some people I'd been friends with before. There are ways in which this project was deeply impactful and meaningful to them, and they are continuing the legacy of it in various ways. People are meeting with groups of people that they met in the performance. There's a woman in Oakland named Wanda Sabir who came out with a whole crew, and they participated in the army of the enslaved. In the past two years, there have been gatherings that were just Zoom meetings, in part because nobody could move because of COVID. She's really taken responsibility for organizing and pulling together about 20 or 25 people to talk about: What did we do? What are we doing, and how do we carry this forward? So, meetings like that are happening. There are ways in which the core ideas of the project are continuing in other people. Some people have moved to Mexico, or are taking it up and performing in their own way in Chicago. It is a dynamic, ongoing thing.

So, yes, having an army matters. There are people that are continuing to work on the ideas of the project and to talk about it. People are continuing to think about it, which matters, you know. It matters in their daily lives. But also, who knows when one of those people is going to be an art historian or a producer, or work for public television or as a documentary filmmaker, or just tell their children, you know?

JPF: Do you think that all of those activities—continuing to talk about *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, continuing to organize, continuing to be inspired by the ideas of it—does that constitute a form of conservation of the work?

DS: It's absolutely a form of conservation, and extension. There's a range of types of performance. David Hammons famously pissed on a piece by Richard Serra.[2] I think he was the only person there, and yet it got recorded. So that is a discrete performance. The legacy of the performance is how it gets memorialized, written about, discussed, and that doesn't have the same need to be redone and reimagined. Whereas a community-engaged project like this is not something that's fixed in time, it's not a singular act. Even though there was a singular two-day act, it was really a seven-year project that is ongoing. So that ongoingness is both preservation and extension of the existing work.

JPF: I hear you navigating the space between history and art—for example, in thinking about whether *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*'s documentation should go to an historical or an art historical archive. You often make reference to historical situations and specific historical events in your work. Why did you choose the strategy of reenactment for this piece? What does it mean to do reenactment in the space of art?

DS: Many people have done interesting, exciting things, both in historical research and in art. There's a great book by Vincent Brown called *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (2020), which looks in particular at

a revolt that happened in Jamaica in 1760 and 1761. I like Kara Walker's work a lot. I think some of what she's done with slavery, how she actually makes the continuum of history present, is interesting. Her *Sugar Baby* piece was just amazing.[3] It was devastating.

There are artists who have used reenactment in interesting ways; I'm not the first or the only. Jefferson Pinder has done some really interesting stuff. His most recent and interesting work has been with "Red Summer," which was a series of race riots that took place in the United States in 1919, right after World War One. For his *Red Summer Road Trip* in 2019, Jefferson reenacted several of those in a couple of places around the country, in site-responsive ways. There's also Mark Tribe's *Port Huron Project* (2006–2008) and Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* (2001).[4] It's turned out to be an interesting way to engage history.

But there's lots of ways to engage this history. I don't claim that reenactment is the only or the best way. In the case of *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, I think it was a very good way, because it was able to bring in community in a site-responsive way that allowed lots more participation and lots of deeper engagement. And it crossed the barriers between the fine art world, which I care about, and the broader world, which I also care about. I think a lot of times people in the arts are overly focused on the art world.

The literal way *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* came about is that, probably about 10 years ago, I had the idea that I'd love to see a slave rebellion reenactment. That thought ended up in a notebook or a computer file somewhere. And then about nine years ago, I got invited to the McColl Center to do a residency. So I said, I'll do a slave rebellion reenactment. I just opened that notebook and found it, and I didn't know what I meant by it. I knew that it was a good idea, but I hadn't even thought about Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave*. I hadn't thought about Evreinov's "Storming of the Winter Palace."[5] At the time, I just thought this would be an interesting thing.

I initially thought it was a project about slavery, and then I came to understand that it's a project about freedom and emancipation. Focusing on the repression is not something I was interested in. People often think about slavery in terms of the trauma, which is important for people to engage. But at a certain point I realized, if you think about it for just a half second, you know that slavery was brutal and that white people did some terrible things. So let's move on to what people don't know: That people fought in a self-determined way for emancipation and freedom. That's the main legacy we need to take from that. That's what's rare. The fact that slavery was oppressive is commonplace. What's rare is that people collectively found a way to fight against it. It's rare, but not unique.

Reenactment has the ability to draw in ordinary people who have interest in a particular history or subject, and allows them to bring that knowledge and interest to bear in a broader social context. That turned out to be really interesting. If I was just doing, say, a set of photographs or a film about this, it wouldn't have happened in the same way. I didn't know the majority of the people who were the reenactors until the reenactment itself; I knew, say, a

hundred of them, but I didn't know all 350. One person came up to me during the reenactment and said, "Thank you for letting me take part in this." I didn't understand why. He said, "Look, I'm a prisoner. I was in prison for 10 years until a few months ago. I was in prison, and now I'm embodying freedom."

Charles Deslondes, who was the key organizer of the 1811 rebellion, went from plantation to plantation and organized people who became his lieutenants, and they in turn organized other people on their plantations and brought them in. We mirrored that structure a bit in organizing this. I talked with a handful of people, and they talked with people they thought should be part of it. The reenactment turned out to be about 70% women-identified people and 30% male-identified. The point is that when people got approached initially, they went to people they thought should participate, and a majority of people for whom this was resonant were women and gender non-conforming people, and they were fierce and determined. It was wonderful.

This was a reenactment of a particular past, but it was also as much, if not more, about the present and how people get free today. It was using this language of reenactment, the language of this specific rebellion, to talk about the present. People for whom this mattered deeply went to their friends and they brought their friends in. If I were, say, casting a movie, none of that would have happened. But I said, Go find the people for whom this matters. We're embodying this history of freedom and emancipation. You're playing yourself—using the language of reenactment, wearing outdated clothing, but this is about the present and the future. Then all sorts of people could say, "Well, look, I need to get free today. I'm going to click up with my friends and my family." That's who came out for this.

The thing about reenactment, even Civil War reenactment, is that it's a very social thing. I didn't know this, but it turned out that people rehearse every weekend, they get together and they have beer with their friends. It's a community, a gathering space. That happened somewhat organically with *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*. That's something positive about reenactment that would be better than photographs. The photographs of the project are great, and they're part of how the artwork lives on. But why reenactment happened to be a good form—things happened that I didn't necessarily plan for, but that became a really important part of the project.

JPF: In terms of documentation, I understand that there's also a film being made by John Akomfrah?

DS: I knew going into this that thousands of people would see it live, but that the majority of people would see it by some sort of documentation, whether it's written, photographic, video, film. I really wanted to make sure that all this effort was preserved in some way. I've known John for a long time, about 20 years—and in that intervening period, he went from being a cult icon to this major filmmaker. I thought his approach to history, and colonialism, and decolonial struggle would be perfect for this project. The collaboration was, Look, I'm doing this performance. You stay out of my way for the performance because I know how to do that better than anybody. And I'll stay out of your

way for the film, because if I try and put my hands in the film, I'm going to fuck it up. You're going to make a brilliant film. I don't know what you're going to do, but just come do a film.

It's going to be a multi-channel, probably a five-channel film. We will have to find a venue that would show it. It's got to be a major museum or something like that, and they tend to program a couple of years out. So I just don't know when the world will see this. John has over 240 hours of footage. He did a nine-camera shoot, and the quality of the footage is stunning. John's a badass filmmaker, and people will be amazed and impressed by whatever the hell he does with it. And I will be too.

JPF: Let's assume not only that it's going to be a great film, but also that you're going to feel that it's a good representation of *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*. Even with that assumption, do you think there's a potential concern that the film—which is easier to put on in a museum than a 350-person march—could become synonymous with the work itself, and that the live aspect of it could fall aside?

DS: I think that will happen, which I think is unfortunate. Right now, the way the world knows the work is through performance stills and some of the flags. Clifford Owens did a project called "Anthology" at MoMA PS1, and he asked people to provide scores for him to reinterpret.[6] He also took scores of existing Black performance art. In the catalog, he talks a lot about why much of his performance is presented as photography, and how photography is perhaps a better medium to present performance than video. As an artist who uses a lot of performance, I have to think about that, and I typically find that performance stills allow an open-endedness which is more akin to the way performance is. The audience brings a lot to it, and there's a lot that's unknown, and people don't think that it's the entirety of the piece. They see the piece, but then they have to think about what isn't seen, whereas with video, it tends to collapse things down into something more pedestrian: "This is everything that happened." A five-channel piece I don't think would have that same effect. But I do think that the film, in all likelihood, is going to be more well-known as documentation of the work than the performance stills.

I hope that people will look back in five, 10, 20 years, and look at some of the original photographs from *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, and not just look at the film. To see if any of the reenactors that are still around. To see that, say, this 19-year-old kid at Xavier University in Louisiana went on to become a lawyer and is fighting for civil rights, or a revolutionary activist leading efforts at fundamental change, to talk with them about this project and what it means to them. So, I think there are ways in which some people will continue to have access to the original. But things that get popularly distributed and become popular will overshadow their source material. If you do a search for "slave rebellion" now, a lot of times what comes up is *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*. This was an artwork. This was not Nat Turner. It's not that people are stupid, but I think that sometimes the remounting of history eclipses the history. And I think that will happen with John's film.

JPF: There is, as you say, the danger that the reenactment comes to stand for what actually happened. But people who take reenactment seriously believe that,

in the act of copying history, you're also generating new historical knowledge—that you genuinely come to know more about what really took place. This might be especially relevant for histories that have been marginalized, or have only been told from one side. Were you thinking about that with this project?

DS: I wasn't so much thinking about that at the beginning of the project, but in the midst of it—and now—absolutely. Because we were doing reenactment, we had the freedom—but we also had the necessity—to fill in gaps in the historic record. In a very literal way, we knew from some of the writings that exist that the 1811 rebels carried flags. There's no record of what they were, and I think that history is not only unknown, but probably literally unknowable. Even if you had all the research money and time in the world, it's unlikely that you'll find what the flags actually were. But because I was reenacting something, I could either not have any flags, which would have been historically inaccurate, or I could imagine what the flags might have been. I'm an artist; I'm not presenting history. I'm imagining what the history might have been. You need to figure out what these flags were, and to think about what concerns people might have had in making flags. I just did the best I could. But I'm not a historian, I'm an artist. I'm just making pictures. But the historians thought it was important. We were thinking about the troop movements of the army of the enslaved, how they had to fight—all those things that I, as an artist, suddenly had to confront. And I had the artistic license to play fast and loose with the history. That's important.
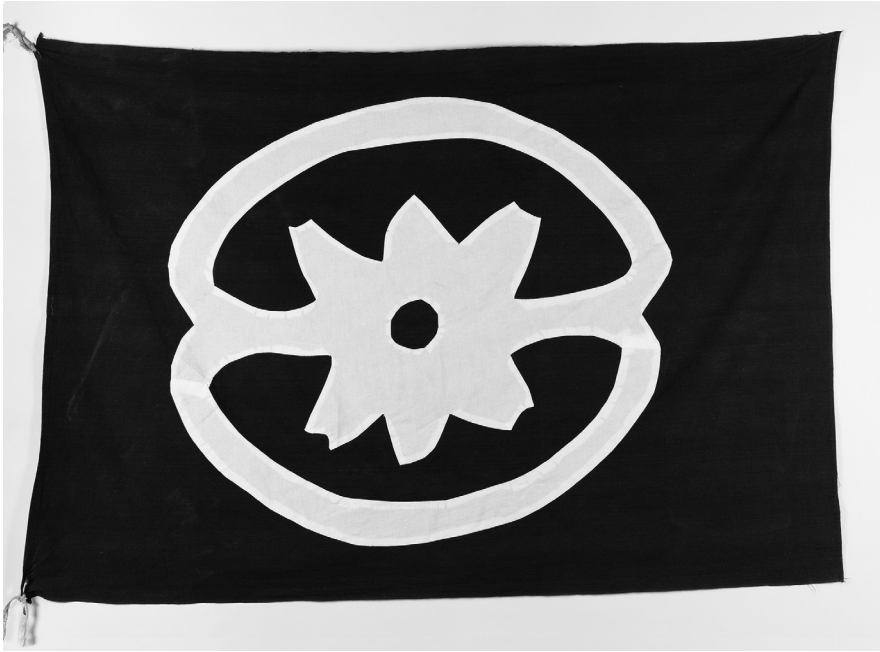
Figure 11.2 Dread Scott, *Army of the Enslaved Flag (adinkra)*, 2019. Hand sewn cotton appliqué. Dimensions: 41" × 52".

I very quickly came to understand that, even though I was very concerned with getting the costuming and movements right, my concern for that was for the social questions that were involved with the project. Civil War reenactments are probably more accurate in many respects—about the costumes, about the troop movements, down to the glasses people wore. And yet they get the fundamental question of that history wrong. It's a southern thing, and it's mostly done by people who think the South were the good guys, and that if they do the reenactment one more time, the good guys are going to win. They're trying to rewrite the actual historical record. And many people that do it internalize it so deeply that that's what comes out in their presentation, that's what they embody. It's a white supremacist embodying of the Civil War in US history. There's a point to that, because that is the legacy which America lives every day. But *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* was concerned with getting the social questions right. Although we were really good on the costumes. We looked at lithographs and paintings from the French colonial Atlantic world, but also runaway slave ads.[7] We felt it was important to give a nuanced view of what people wore—to give enslaved people back their humanity, so that present-day people could have a different understanding of what enslaved people thought, dressed, did, how they had agency, even within an enslaved, oppressed condition. But we spent a lot of effort getting that right also so that the social questions could be gotten right. Civil War reenactors are promoting—intentionally or not—an upside-down, errant view of history.

We were interested in presenting a liberating view of history and grounding that intentionally. Even if we got some of the clothing or troop movements wrong. We were very intentionally not trying to be in a bucolic setting with no modern things. We wanted to have the modern oil refinery in the shot, because it was the past commingling with the present in a way that created a friction or dissonance. That was really important to the project. One writer said that, with a lot of Civil War reenactment, what they try to do is transport the audience to the past.[8] We were trying to time-travel an army of the enslaved into the present, so the audience stays in the same time space. It's the reenactors that move in time. And that's an interesting difference in how the two are approached. There is a question of what the reenactors learn through doing, but if you understand the social questions differently, what you learn is going to be different. And the history you present is going to be different.

JPF: Given everything that you're saying about different kinds of accuracy, social meaning versus precise historical detail, what does it mean to reenact a history that didn't quite occur the way that you retold it? Rather than a reenactment of the past, does *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* become something like a rehearsal for a successful revolutionary future?

DS: Yes. In talking with people about why they chose to participate, one of the reenactors, Jaga Gola, basically said that this is not about the past. He said, "I don't think it's a reenactment. I think this is learning about the material, social, spiritual costs. But also the practice of insurrection."[9] It's the muscle memory for an insurrection.

Again, time is slippery. It is about the past, but it is also about the present and the future. On the one hand, the ending of the project was different than the 1811 history. We interrupted the historic timeline in getting people into the city of New Orleans and ending with a cultural celebration as opposed to a slaughter. That's true. But going back to the point I made earlier, that everybody knows that slavery was brutal—that's not a new story. If we'd done that story, that would be historically inaccurate, in that what was significant about this 1811 rebellion is that it was a rebellion. We were actually historically accurate in keeping the focus on the liberatory, the rebellion aspect, even though the ending was different.

If you look at it as more a snapshot into social questions, the presentation was actually about what really happened. The Whitney Plantation in Louisiana is the one museum to slavery in the US. They have a sort of a testament to 1811 at the Whitney Plantation, and it's basically severed heads—which is what happened at the end. It's an attempt to memorialize the people who were the leaders and rebels that got slaughtered at the end. The presentation at this historic site focuses on the repression and the martyrdom. And that's not what's unique here. What's really special is that people had this bold and audacious plan to overthrow the system of enslavement and set up a republic in the new world. *Slave Rebellion Reenactment* is honoring that. It's about how you understand that past, but also how that past, that legacy of freedom fighters, can be operative in the present—and how the people who participated in the reenactment can become those leaders.

Which is not to say that everybody that participated is suddenly going to take up arms against the modern-day successor of enslavement. Some might; some might be revolutionaries. Others might interpret that in different ways. But the point is that the rebels had this uncompromising position. What's the problem? We're enslaved. What's the solution? End enslavement. Let's figure out how to do that. If people had that thinking, say, in addressing police brutality or climate change or wealth inequality or mass incarceration, or any number of other things which are direct descendants of a world founded upon enslavement, where capitalism was bound up with slavery and created the foundations for our modern world, not just in the United States, but globally… If people had that approach—"We have to get free whatever the cost, by any means necessary, let's figure that out"—they would act differently than they do in their political spheres and in social engagement. And that, I think, is what the legacy is. These were freedom fighters. They were people trying to get free. That bold, imaginative, audacious thinking and planning, recognizing that the only way they could get free was not to escape personally, but to overthrow the system of slavery. In modern times, if more people can think like that, with that courage, but also vision, that would be transformative. That's what we were trying to keep the emphasis on, and—with greater or lesser success—that's what we did.

Notes

1 The Amistad Research Center, located at Tulane University in New Orleans, is "committed to collecting, preserving, and providing open access to original materials

that reference the social and cultural importance of America's ethnic and racial history, the African Diaspora, human relations, and civil rights." For more information, see: https://www.amistadresearchcenter.org.

2 In 1981, Hammons urinated on Serra's sculpture *T.W.U.* (1980–81). The performance was photographed by Dawoud Bey.

3 The full title of Kara Walker's ephemeral installation, which was installed inside a former sugar refinery in Brooklyn in 2014, is *At the behest of Creative Time Kara E. Walker has confected: Kara Walker – A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant.*

4 For Tribe's *Port Huron Project*, performers reenacted protest speeches from the US New Left movement of the 1960s and '70s. In *Battle of Orgreave,* Deller organized a reenactment of a pivotal event in the 1984–85 UK miners' strike, in which police violently confronted protesters and, later, falsely claimed that the miners were responsible for the violence.

5 In 1920, Nikolai Evreinov dramatically restaged events from the 1917 October Revolution, when Bolshevik guards forced their way into the Winter Palace, then seat of the provisional government, and arrested its ministers. Evreinov called "The Storming of the Winter Palace" a "mass action." Sergei Eisenstein's 1927 film *October: Ten Days That Shook the World* also featured reenactments of these events.

6 For this 2011–12 exhibition, Owens exhibited performance instructions and documentation solicited from 26 Black artists.

7 For more information about the costuming, which was by Alison L. Parker, see: Jonathan Square, "The Story of Costuming Dread Scott's Reenactment of the Largest Slave Rebellion in US History," *Fashionista*, November 12, 2019, https://fashionista.com/2019/11/1811-german-coast-uprising-slave-rebellion-reenactment-costumes.

8 John Muse, "Review of Dread Scott, *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, New Orleans, November 8–9, 2019," *CAA Reviews,* March 17, 2020, http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/3700.

9 Jaga Kola (aka Brother Dane) quoted in: *Dread Scott: Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, directed by Ava Wiland and Rafael Salazar (RAVA Films, 2015), https://abladeofgrass.org/fieldworks/fieldworks-dread-scott.

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12 Conserving a performance about conservation

Care and preservation in Mierle Laderman Ukeles's maintenance art

Karolina Wilczyńska

The maintenance artist

Care and conservation have been the concern of many artists creating performance art, but only one called herself a *maintenance artist* and made preservation, broadly understood, her main goal by placing it at the center of the debate about social and feminist issues. For Mierle Laderman Ukeles, the need to preserve, to care and to maintain is crucial for an art museum—as well as economic order, society and nature—to survive. Nevertheless, in Western societies, maintenance systems have been classified as secondary to capitalist development.[1] Being undervalued, labor, maintenance and care are usually associated with the status quo; however, they are part of a political process that could disturb power relations or, on the contrary, become malevolent systems of control.[2] Finding this dualism socially unresolvable, Ukeles dedicated her practice to maintenance systems themselves in their social capacity, by involving this peculiar paradox rooted in the very maintenance that could simultaneously serve as a work of care and control of work.

The political significance of maintenance systems lies in the mundane necessity of support for institutions that constitute the fabric of their everyday. In her actions, Ukeles problematizes this relationship between the subject, the performance, and the object, and the systems of maintaining the shifting interdependence between all of those factors. As conservation itself involves objects associated not only with time and space, but also bodies, politics, economics, conventions and values, it therefore plays a crucial and dual role in what Jacques Rancière called the *distribution of the sensible*: that is, in constituting the sensible experience of social existence, of *the common,* and deciding who is able to share this experience and who is going to be excluded from it as an other.[3] The very being of political subjects is based on the ground provided by maintenance systems: care practices are normalization methods of gender, race and class roles, as caregiving work is often done by the excluded in the interest of keeping a particular vision of hegemonic order legitimized. Even personal and individual acts of care are manifestations of embodied social codes that are the subject of public debate, such as, for instance, a woman's role as a mother within medical and legal discourses. At the same time, the need to care for

oneself or for the community could create collective acts of resistance by orga-
nizing new methods of support. In this context of a Rancièrian *distribution of
the sensible*, each decision to care is always already political. In consequence,
the very performance of conservation raises questions about how the same set
of gestures could be oppressive, caring and emancipating at the same time, and
under what circumstances actions of preservation could be realized or reima-
gined. By using Ukeles's performance as a case study, I demonstrate how the
process of preservation is entangled in different political and institutional con-
texts, and what it means to conserve a performance about conservation.

I suggest that performance be understood not as a fixed definition but rather
as a broad phenomenon. Performance is defined differently according to various
disciplines: as an artistic event by theater theory, as a transfer of knowledge by
anthropology, or as a work executed by the body in a manifestation of its
socio-political implications by cultural and gender studies. I employ all the
above-mentioned definitions to set them in mutual tension. Such an approach
problematizes the relation between performing body and object, especially in
the context of Ukeles's maintenance art, as care is work done in relation to
something external. Does an object of maintenance activity force a work of care
to stay the same or does a work of care slowly change an object in relation to a
caring body? As mentioned before, there is a paradox rooted in the nature of
maintenance that is distinctive to Western societies. The very paradox works
through the philosophical tradition of the Enlightenment—which draws a sharp
line between the subject and the object—as well as theories such as feminist
new materialisms, which question this division and state that the subject is
already a part of the object. Therefore, the matter is not stable but rather a
dynamic process.[4] In fact, this dynamicity is crucial for feminist artists. Since
the 1970s they have been working with the concept of the dematerialization of
the art object (the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary) and
the exploration of the female body in performance art. Within such tension,
care work produces different kinds of performances in which the materiality of
the object and the boundary between the subject and the object are questioned
or reinforced, depending on which hegemony it serves.

Furthermore, the broader understanding of performance problematizes its
documentation as the object of performance conservation and historical narra-
tives. The approach assumed in this article reflects the tensions between the
different performance categories in various disciplines, in which dynamic and
sometimes incompatible relations between aesthetics, politics, art history nar-
ratives and museum practices are set in motion in continual negotiation of the
object of performance conservation. Hence, conservation and art history serve
as rather a performative support that constantly changes the performance's
various manifestations. In such a context, an image, gesture, body and artifact
operate as transformative categories that merge into one another, and which
appear in different moments of performance history. The same artwork might
appear in distant times and places as a photograph, reenactment, material
object, narrative, movie or a piece of choreography, that can all function as the

performance documentation. The transformative potential of this performance documentation is supported or constrained by what Bojana Kunst called the "production of performance history" and "the political use" of the performing arts.[5] Some art history narratives impact upon performance and its documentation, reducing its constant changeability to its one manifestation subordinated to a particular vision of historic events. It is important to retrace how the knowledge of the performance was historically constructed, and what ramifications it created for conservation practices. This is the case for the feminist artworks that have been documented, exhibited and collected—often in traditional ways—by the institutions criticized by feminist artists in the first place. In consequence, the preservation of feminism in the museum often neutralized its politics.[6]

From the perspective of relations between conservation and performance outlined above, I shall analyze *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object: With the Maintenance Man, the Maintenance Artist, and the Museum Conservator* (1973), a performance by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who has made maintenance her ongoing social practice and investigated care as a systemic, feminist and political factor. She became a maintenance artist when she decided to refer to her daily chores as a mother (or as she described the mother's role, *a care worker*) as art. The reproductive labor of women—understood as an unpaid activity reproducing the work force by daily actions such as cooking or bearing children—was elevated to the artistic process. The transformation was expressed in the famous "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!" in which Ukeles introduced the new language for care, as the work of support was generally taken for granted and rarely discussed at that time.[7] It was a moment when the Enlightenment rationality of the capitalist and patriarchal system was challenged by feminism. For the artist, making a caring body and its work in the domestic realm visible in a public space was the main goal. That is why in the early 1970s her maintenance practice evolved from the private sphere to the institutional one in which she executed her *Transfer*. I will argue that in this performance, Ukeles confronted different practices of care within the institutional realm of an art museum to see if maintenance as a repetition of labor, coded in social order and emancipation of the care work itself, could be redefined. At the same time, the longevity of her performance presents a problematic approach to its conservation, its place in art history and its relation to time, exposing some limitations of institutional critique practice, but also opening new possibilities for conservation work. Hence, I shall look back upon the production of her performance history as well, presenting the relations between art history narratives and conservation practices.

The maintenance of an art object

After reading Ukeles's manifesto published in *Artforum* in 1971, the art critic and curator Lucy Lippard invited the artist to take part in the exhibition called *c. 7,500*. It was a travelling show curated by Lippard, in which she exhibited works by twenty-six female conceptual artists in different cities in the United States and in London in the United Kingdom. Ukeles presented several art works as part of the

exhibition: a red photo-scrapbook entitled *Maintenance Art Tasks* that included images of her work-as-art projects; a chain attached to the album and a rag intended for its cleaning; a series of black and white photos of *Dressing to Go Out/ Undressing to Go In*, showing her dressing her children. She also distributed the Maintenance Art Questionnaire for the audience and artists to fill in at each and every venue and included *Maintenance Art Tapes*, recorded interviews with several people discussing their own maintenance tasks. Envious of her art works traveling across the country while she was working at home, Ukeles proposed to the local curators that she would perform her maintenance art as a part of the exhibition at each stop of the exhibition. For each venue, she prepared different ephemeral actions.[8] Her first stop was at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in Hartford in July 20, 1973, where for the *c.7,500* show, she executed four performances: *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object: With the Maintenance Man, the Maintenance Artist, and the Museum Conservator; The Keeping of the Keys; Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside* and *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Inside*. Those actions were an analysis of the museum's maintenance practices that together amounted to a critique of the art institution.[9]

Figure 12.1 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object: Mummy Maintenance: With the Maintenance Man, the Maintenance Artist, and the Museum Conservator*, July 20, 1973. Eleven 16 × 20 in. photographs, three 20 × 16 in., and three 11 × 8½ in. handwritten texts. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

The first performance, *Transfer*, consisted of the same set of gestures of maintenance—cleaning the glass vitrine protecting an art object—performed by three different figures. Ukeles scrutinized the work of a male museum maintenance worker (who cleaned the regular museum glass vitrine), a female artist (who repeated his cleaning moves creating a "painting" on the glass vitrine) and a male museum conservator (who preserved the vitrine as a work of art and, as such, cleaned it again). She exposed the hierarchical structure and captured the power of the institution of the museum, which in 1973 carried out more of a conservative mission than today, becoming an obvious target for radical artists disgusted by the museum "system."[10] In the 1970s, the museum was perceived by radical artists as an oppressive institution, reproducing the patriarchal and capitalist order by focusing on collecting and conserving the imperialist heritage of the West. For a traditional museum, the acquisition and preservation of single objects was the main objective and focus of conservation work. This process—like most of the collection—was hidden from the public eye in storage, as was the work of daily maintenance of the museum building.[11]

In this simple operation, Ukeles made maintenance work visible and raised a question about the transfer of its value between those three figures so essential for the art institution to exist but operating on three completely different levels. Rather than proposing alternatives for this hierarchical structure, Ukeles critically exposed it by showing that all those figures were captured and preserved in their roles by the power of the institution. In doing so, she posed the question who had the power to decide what is going to be preserved—as well as how, when and where—and under what circumstances maintenance work could be classified as the qualified and specialized work of conservation. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor stresses that performance is a vital act of transfer, the embodied behavior, the bodily process of archive-in-action that constantly repeats in the experience of previous cultural patterns and social norms.[12] By repeating a gesture of care in the specific institutional space of an art museum and in a peculiar hierarchical sequence, Ukeles analyzed its choreographic and normative aspects to expose the hegemonic power to establish and restrict social roles. The same action carried a different meaning as each person embodied a different identity, as if the care work was a pure manifestation of their positions. In other words, by performing conservation, she showed how the conservation itself was used against the emancipatory capacity of the performance.

For the transfer of maintenance gestures, Ukeles chose a vitrine containing a five-thousand-year-old Egyptian female mummy that was then on display at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum, on loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The choice of the art object was not accidental. The artist had deliberately picked the mummy because of its visible breasts.[13] Furthermore, the word mummy, of course, has a double meaning, referring both to a mother and a mummified corpse.[14] Ukeles wanted to emphasize the womanhood and motherhood of this art object as well as mummification as an extraordinary process of preserving primary waste; that is, human remains.[15] The artist did not refer to the actual ancient situation of Egyptian women or culture from that

time period. This aspect of her performance is more symbolic, playing with the feminist revolution of the 1970s by linking a woman/mother with the invisible work of care and reproductive labor in a broader historic and patriarchal perspective.[16] The mummy represented "many women, the ancient maintenance class who were told that's who they were meant to be without bothering to ask them."[17] This Egyptian woman, who used to care for and maintain her own supposed family, had died and been preserved for the seemingly eternal life of a fixed art object that needs to be taken care of, but only by a male conservator who had the power to sustain her/its status as a commoditized artifact. As the female mummy emerged after thousands of years as an art object (paraphrasing the Guerilla Girls, women had to be naked or dead to get into the museum), the artist tried to establish a bodily relationship with the past for the temporary reanimation of her Egyptian counterpart.

Ukeles's position as a maintenance artist, as a mother and as a woman was strongly manifested in the *c.7,500* exhibition space, featuring photographs of the artist taking care of her children in the *Maintenance Art Tasks* album. Interestingly, her motherly care work is also strongly highlighted in the archival photographic documentation of the performance that was never presented as an official work of art. On the negatives from the personal archive of the artist, one can see Ukeles holding her baby in the background or standing above the baby stroller during the performance while the other two participants of the action were executing their duties. By performing maintenance herself in relation to the mummy, Ukeles created a maternal bond, a timeless chain of feminine gestures conducting reproductive labor. This motherly aspect of the work was intensified by a rag normally used to clean a museum's protective display case: the same type of muslin diaper that was used for changing babies in the 1970s.[18] This care artifact, a diaper, points to the gender inequality of reproductive labor as undervalued work done invisibly by women in the private, domestic sphere. The work of maintenance has no beginning and no end: the work done by this ancient female body back in the past was just as endless as it is today, and will remain so in the future, as if maintenance and care work were a pure performance in themselves. According to Richard Schechner, a performance never happens for the first time, because performance is a preserved repetition, a "twice-behaved behavior."[19] Care work is inscribed in and imposed on women's bodies, and only by making this work visible could one start performing "ritual negotiations" on the political meaning of maintenance in a social order.[20]

The glass vitrine and the ritualized hierarchical gestures of maintenance within the art institution, however, did not allow the artist to touch ancient remains. As Patricia Philips noted, a general and justifiable rule of museum maintenance is that only conservators are permitted to touch, hold, and clean a work of art in an act of professional care.[21] The hierarchical structure of power and the fixed procedures of preservation did not cause materiality to regain its agency, as it was lying there, protected under the glass vitrine. It presents the necropolitical aspect of the museum rooted in its imperial past—the aim was to

Figure 12.2 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object: Mummy Maintenance: With the Maintenance Man, the Maintenance Artist, and the Museum Conservator*, July 20, 1973. Eleven 16 × 20 in. photographs, three 20 × 16 in., and three 11 × 8½ in. handwritten texts. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

hide the fact that behind the artifact, behind the art object, lay a dead body in its fragmented forms of remains that could open the possibility for a political reconfiguration of *the common*. It is almost as if the very act of care for remains was something disruptive (too performative, too corporeal) so it had to be divided into the gendered, invisible and undervalued work—"naturally" done by women or by others excluded from the dominant vision of *the common*—and the qualified, professionalized labor of preserving and ordering, keeping things fixed as they should be. The work of maintenance must be done all the time, therefore, in a patriarchal capitalist society, it had been captured and subordinated to different economic and political hierarchies, distributed and redistributed unequally.[22] Hence, the mummy had to be presented as an artifact to conserve this patriarchal and capitalist system within its own logic. The dynamic, biological and feminine life of the material itself had to be hidden to sustain the illusion of the stability of the object chosen to be preserved as a relic of a lost culture and also as a manifestation of a system that possesses the power to define, fix, remove from or restore to the public view, and which also claims the right to capture the performative capacity of remains.

Here, the ambivalence and politics of conservation are clear. As an aesthetic force—understood in the Rancièrian sense of designing the common world and

the conditions under which it is experienced—conservation also recreates and preserves the particularly divided social order constituted by public institutions and agents. The very necessity of sustaining the past, the state of this need (something has to be done to prevent loss) makes an act of care fragile in a sense that the maintenance systems could be easily used as mechanisms of control. Just like a mother needs to take care of her children, remains need to be preserved as traces of history. In the fear of loss however, the variability of care practices deeply involved in the fluid and dynamic condition of their activity objects became subordinated to archival cataloging. A mother could not find her own place in the art space nor could she in the public one, being perceived as part of a family unit raising future citizens. At the same time, these ancient remains of a dead woman became deprived of their organic ability to disrupt the obviousness of the institutional narratives in this almost laboratory process of cleaning. The care performance around the mummy was then generated by the status of the art object as a fixed entity, as a specimen. Interaction of humans with materiality became ritualized in the museum and kept under lock and key.

The maintenance man, the maintenance artist and the museum conservator

As a maintenance artist was forbidden to have direct contact with the mummy and access was restricted to professionals only, Ukeles decided to analyze the maintenance hierarchy of the museum on the protective glass vitrine. The boundary between the art realm and the everyday reality of the institution was about to generate a set of maintenance operations and transfers of value. The exterior of the display case that protected the artifact constituted a particular shared space, where various caring practices crossed. The display case served as a symbolic surface for distributing the sensible, on which the very same gesture was experienced differently. In doing so, the artist revealed who had the capacity to be an active political subject within the art institution and who remained passive and invisible, and how the institution would react if the protected and defined values were negotiated and transferred.

The first figure that approached the vitrine within the frame of Ukeles's project was a maintenance worker responsible for maintaining the general cleanliness of the building, who washed the glass using a spray bottle and a soft cloth diaper. His undervalued work was linked with women's reproductive labor because, as Julia Bryan-Wilson stresses, it was invisible not only because this type of work had to be perpetually performed, but because this type of work was undertaken by women in the private domain.[23] Then the artist stepped in and cleaned the vitrine, mimicking what the worker had done with the spray cleaner and the diaper. Upon concluding her maintenance work, she called it art and stamped the surface of the protective display case and the diaper with the Maintenance Art Work Original stamp.[24] According to Philips, the vitrine was no longer part of the conventional furniture of art display and protection, because—by the Duchampian power of the artist's creative act—it had turned into a work of art.

Figure 12.3 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object: Mummy Maintenance: With the Maintenance Man, the Maintenance Artist, and the Museum Conservator*, July 20, 1973. Eleven 16 × 20 in. photographs, three 20 × 16 in., and three 11 × 8½ in. handwritten texts. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

However, this transformation into an art object had to be acknowledged by an official from the art institution. The whole transfer could then be completed solely by the museum conservator, who was immediately compelled to write a new condition report authenticating the vitrine as a work of art in its own right. At this point, Ukeles handed the cleaning materials to the conservator, who became the only one allowed to touch the vitrine/artwork which he had cleaned/ preserved, mimicking the artist's gestures.

By giving the vitrine artwork status, Ukeles dissolved the line or surface between artifact and everyday institutional space. In opposition to the modernist thesis, in which the surface isolates the purity of an art object, the artist transformed the surface of the vitrine into a place where the museum system was on display. The protective and controlling mechanisms over the mummy broke to the surface of the glass vitrine, at the same time exposing the stratified structure of *the common*. Rancière asserts that a flat surface is always a surface of communication.[25] However, communication and *the common* do not imply equality and emancipation. *The common* can differentiate access and experience regarding its assigned position in the social order. The surface of the vitrine, accessible at some point for each of the three people, manifested itself to them in various meanings: a surface for cleaning, a canvas for creation and an art

object to control. This leads to Maurizio Ferraris's claim that objects are inscribed acts.[26] An institutional structure assured by legal documents creates a particular social realm in which social objects as works of art reproduce some mechanisms of exclusions and inclusion in one's behavior. One object generated the same gestures but with completely different social consequences. Not everyone had the right to define and preserve art works, just as not everyone had the right to be an outright subject in a public sphere (the invisibility of the work of maintenance workers and women artists in museums) and nor was everyone allowed to see chosen art works (in the 1970s, there was no policy of free admission for all, which made public access to the collection class-restricted). The conservator was forced to embody the role of the vitrine/artwork guardian. If the glass surface had performed this modernist separating function previously, it would then have been transferred to the conservator. He acted as the policing force, securing the object's permanence and preventing its decay: the whole museum space was revealed as a space where not only objects, but also performing subjects are policed.

In her analysis of *Transfer,* Philips also notes that, compared with other institutions, museums remain strictly hierarchical environments; therefore, in order to conserve, protect and display art, a highly regulated structure had to be constructed and secured through a closely monitored and constrained system of work, roles and responsibilities.[27] In the museum, the organizational chart is rigidly stratified, and job descriptions and reporting structures are precise— except, for Philips, upon the completion and consecration of the series of transfers. Ukeles's performance had rendered power, authority, value, institutional protocol, human roles and responsibilities in the museum both fluid and fugitive.[28] I argue that in revealing this rigid structure, Ukeles demonstrated that every attempt to make those values fluid would be captured and petrified by the institution nonetheless, which the subsequent art history narratives further demonstrated. In existing interpretations of *Transfer*, the repetition of the same gestures is perceived as raising the value of maintenance work. In the art history narrative, the whole performance is reduced to the reevaluation of maintenance work captured in a few photographs of the artist with museum workers.[29] This is the case in Helen Molesworth's fascinating reading of the artist's performance in terms of feminist institutional critique and women's labor; Hilary Sample's focus on architecture maintenance; Kari Conte's elaboration of Ukeles's work ballets or Andreas Petrossiants's highlighting of the social reproduction theory of grassroots feminism: each author presents one way of dealing with the documentation, regardless of various problematic frames. In every case, the critical and emancipatory potential of Ukeles's maintenance practice is taken for granted as a self-fulfilling feminist, social or ecological promise, as a completed intervention from outside the criticized status quo that had an immediate political impact on the social realm only by revealing its hidden structures.

Such reduction allows one to read Ukeles's performance as a direct display of the essential value of maintenance work in the public space of the museum. Therefore, the main claim is that by repeating the gesture critically, the artist

made this undervalued work of a maintenance worker visible and by doing so she also appreciated the invisible reproductive labor of women and exposed the capitalistic professionalization of care work.[30] Although in critical theories of neoliberalism, there is nothing outside of capitalism, socially engaged artists like Ukeles seemed to perform directly from utopian, untouched and untamed spaces, revealing imposed structures without any entanglement with them.[31] This was a frequent approach taken by the radical art of the 1970s associated with the New Left. Within this framework, Ukeles is considered an outsider agent that enabled this transfer of value, but without being involved in its ramifications. The broader historical approach that embedded *Transfer* in art history narratives as well as curatorial and conservation practices would allow one to examine how the "production of performance history" has changed over time and how the museum reacted to its role becoming fluid and fugitive.

The manifest image and the production of performance history

Interestingly, art history narratives about Ukeles were only shaped in the late 1990s and early 2000s when a significant shift occurred in performance, feminist and social art, introducing ephemeral actions into art institutions and reevaluating the ephemeral character of a performance. Problems of archiving and documentation were crucial for the debate on performance, which itself was a reaction to new curatorial practices and museums interested in the radical art of the 1970s. During that period, the Wadsworth Atheneum organized the exhibition *Matrix 137* (1998), devoted to Ukeles, who re-entered the museum to show documentation of her maintenance practice. In the same year, the museum purchased the documentation of all four performances of 1973 in the form of framed photographs taken during the events.

For 25 years, the dematerialized and ephemeral status of performance postulated in the 1970s was acknowledged by the museum in regard to Ukeles's actions, but in 1998 the strategy changed. After all, it was also a time when performance artists dug deep into the archives, into historical matter, bringing to light what may have been marginalized in the past, and had since been neglected and forgotten.[32] The use of photography was often merely practical but, at the same time, it was also an attempt to establish a performance's materiality and bear testimony to it. On the one hand, in most cases the photographic documentation was already there and easy to sustain. On the other hand, the photographic documentation itself—together with art narratives—established the specific relation of a performance to its history, especially when it comes to the 1970s radical art of the New Left. I point this context out, so that Ukeles's *Transfer* may be analyzed from a position that combines Ferraris's view, that the social world is manifested through the production of documents, and the previously mentioned postulate of Bojana Kunst to rethink the "production of performance history" in order to see what politics it serves.

It seems that with time, the art history narrative embedded in the legacy of the New Left turned into a machine of canonization that tends to preserve the

political fixed image (vs. fixed object) of the event itself. The performance was reduced to a photographically captured gesture performed from outside of the oppressive order as a feminist or political intervention. The photographic document is then merely a symbol, a "manifest image" (Ferraris) in which social reality is based on collective intentionality. Here, documents—mainly in the form of photographs—are analyzed rather as a result of a performance and of the "collective intentionality," and as such their capacity, materiality and history have no meaning as they are merely something evident, a by-product that represents and recalls some political events of the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, the fact that the photographs of *Transfer* served as the one and only documentation of the performance is symptomatic. The institutional status of the museum became historiographic rather than a preservationist technology. Kate Eichhorn asserts that it was precisely such a premise that prepared the art world for Jacques Derrida's claim that "archivization produces as much as it records the event."[33]

The very performance and its documentation are understood as a manifestation of feminist ecological shared acceptance, of political enthusiastic cooperation of the agenda that over time became immune to the internal social conflicts that, according to Ferraris, are inscribed in the very materiality of the document itself. Furthermore, such an approach to performance sustains the division between subject and object, and deprives performance of the performative capacity to constantly produce and change social order and institutions. The means by which the museum institution may organize an event (with its archives, exhibitions and conservation practices) are at stake, because, even if the narrative is about the radical history of the New Left, the manifestation of those events is already entangled with the neoliberal matrix of knowledge and the new spirit of capitalism.[34] For Eichhorn, rather than simply reflecting a desire to understand the past on its own fragmented terms, these practices reflect a desire to take control of the present through a reorientation to the past, and in this sense it reproduces neoliberal logic.

This approach to a performance object is usually present in publications about social art, paradoxically serving the production of political performance history. The New Left which, according to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, was failing to stymie the rise of neoliberal forces, was then responsible not only for facilitating the service economy of late capitalism but also failed in creating conditions for the constant actualization of its critical capacity for the present and the future.[35] Therefore, by establishing such an intentional relation to documents, art history often reduces political performance to political declarations and statements in a spirit of dematerialization, apart from the social and material realm of the object/document itself.

It is even more problematic if one considers the above-mentioned negatives from Ukeles's private archive. As the artist has said, back in the 1970s she—like many other artists—was not concerned with documenting her performances. The photographs of *Transfer* were taken by the photographer hired by the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum and later given to the artist. However, with

time, when art history and institutional machinery had started to produce this particular narrative on feminist and performance art, Ukeles started to present chosen photographs from the performance as artwork. What is striking is that she intentionally omitted the photographs in which she is depicted as mother doing care work, as if the necessity of the everyday maintenance had to be hidden to create the manifest image of the performance. As this omission is, of course, understandable in terms of making the artist's intention clear, such unconscious subordination to the "production of performance history" is symptomatic of feminist art's reception using traditional performance documentation.

Yet, performance documentation is concerned not only with images, but also with what Marxists called the materiality of economic structure or mode of production within the institution of the museum, with the materiality of the body and its rituals, and with time. If documentation of Ukeles's performances from the 1970s appears in art history analyzes, it does so only to confirm the event/performance in which political accomplishment and emancipatory potential are simply taken for granted. Paradoxically, the manifest image of the 1970s performance embodies collective consensual agreement around the events that were radical and revolutionary in their nature, aimed at society, the museum, authorship and commodification. It seems then that it is not the potential of the event (New Left revolution) that should be preserved but the political potential to revolt. However, as Ukeles suggested in her performance, capturing this capacity within fixed neutralized objects and definitions is exactly what a traditional museum does. In such a vision, escaping the logic of archives seems impossible. However, banishing the logic of "manifest image" regarding Ukeles's maintenance art enables a transfer of value, means of care and time between a fixed object and the living or dead agent of her performance, as the mummified body locked in the vitrine quietly suggested from the beginning.

Transfer: When does performance end?

In *Transfer*, one could see that the performed gestures were not only staged as an appreciation of maintenance work, but also that they played against each other, back and forth as peculiar responses to the acting out of value. This ambiguous situation raises questions about what happened during the transfer. What was the end of that process? If there even was an end. For Rancière, having time is a basic mode of being; therefore, possessing the power to end an action has political consequences in *the common*. The title of the piece indicates—when we think about performance in Taylor's terms—that performance is precisely the vital act of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity.[36] In the museum, there is a lot of invisible performative labor based around the objects whose hierarchical nature keeps the fixed illusions of the institution. It was basically on that premise that the radical artists of the 1970s attacked art objects as commodities and the museum as the primary gatekeeper of power, prestige and value.[37]

In *Transfer*, the cleaning gestures performed by the maintenance worker, done on a daily basis, appeared so obvious that one could not see the power relations behind it. It could be revealed only by the artist who repeated those gestures to create a piece that she herself immediately entitled a *Dust Painting*. Andrea Neustein, in her interpretation of Ukeles's performance, draws attention to the dust acting upon the artwork. She mentioned Man Ray's *Dust Breeding* from 1920, a photograph depicting Duchamp's *Large Glass* which, left in the artist's studio, collected a layer of dust. According to Neustein, in this action of leaving the piece in the studio Duchamp introduced the figure of the lazy artist refusing to work and, simultaneously, he presented its opposite, the labor-intensive work of art that needs human maintenance work to exist.[38] In *Transfer*, the maintenance worker responded to such need of the artwork to survive. He cleaned the dust from the glass vitrine to maintain its ideal purpose; that is, providing a safe enclosure for the artifact and the clear view for the museum guests. Here, it was not the artwork trying to survive but a particular idea of the object that demands this ongoing maintenance. Neustein stresses that the status quo involves perpetual decay, constant entropy and ongoing breakdown. The performative capacity of remains is pulsating under the archive and the maintenance worker's task is to hide its traces: dust. Care work was arrested to fight against dust as the symbolic particularization of death in life.[39] Hence, it was not the vitrine that was the actual work of art, but the traces of the maintenance worker's hand's motion repeated by Ukeles: the maintenance painting on the vitrine, the removal of dust. Therefore, when the conservator cleaned the vitrine, he paradoxically removed traces of gestures (the dust painting) in order to transform them into a fixed work of art: the glass vitrine. As the conservation report (made during the performance) indicates, the object of conservation was the glass case. At the same time, the conservator's own touch manifested itself as having the power to complete the action. The institutional grasp of the performative gesture came to the fore, erasing the value of everyday care work to preserve the power of the museum in establishing the value of objects in a commodity-oriented economy. Here, there was no dust to remove, only traces of the maintenance worker's labor, reinforcing the idea of the art work as a sublime and fixed object. Something had to be removed to preserve some definition of what the object is or could be in the capitalist patriarchal system. Just like the performativity of the mummy had to be hidden, the value of care and its performative capacity to create value in the social order had to be erased as well to preserve the institution of the museum as such.

In *Proletarian Night,* Rancière refers to Plato's *Republic*, saying that workers cannot do politics because they simply have no time and they must stay in their workplace, subordinated passively to the necessity of labor.[40] Although the value of labor of the maintenance worker in Ukeles's performance was presented, the worker was not emancipated; that was not the point. Instead, Ukeles revealed the rigid structure of hierarchy within the museum that functioned as a kind of self-conserving institution, mirroring social traditional and hierarchical realm. As such, the museum was maintained by the artists and art in general: in such an institution, everyone (even the mummy and the dust) became an agent working to preserve an

inherently established structure. In general, the performance reproduced the exploitation of care work by a western, capitalist and patriarchal society and by doing so Ukeles underlined how persistent mechanisms of control are. These mechanisms encapsulate every attempt to reformulate the role of care as central to a new *distribution of the sensible*—the new common based on an ethic of care and relations as feminists would want.

Instead, the transfer was played through those figures rather than consciously performed by them as individuals. Ukeles did not use the names of the worker or the conservator. All three figures appeared in their exemplary roles—a maintenance worker, an artist and a conservator—which was emphasized in a schematic drawing assisting the documentation of the performance. It depicts the same simplified person, standing in front of the vitrine and cleaning it, while the only change is in the title of their function, as if to emphasize the social roles of those professions imposed on each person, forcing a different meaning.[41] Each and every individual was bounded and restricted by the definition of care stemming from their profession. In such a chain of distribution, the sequence is important as well as the value of time and effort put into an action. In the *distribution of the sensible*, everyone is endowed with the senses that match their condition. To be a political subject *in the common* is to gain the sensory capacity of speech, of being seen and heard not only from a prescribed social position. The workers are "passive" because their activity is supposed to occur only in the realm of immediate needs.[42] If, for Rancière, emancipation occurs when one stops doing as one is told, the worker did the exact opposite.[43] There was no rupture caused by the dissociation between the hand of the worker and his eyes: he was still a worker using his senses as a worker. The value of his work was transferred to the active subject, and the maintenance worker remained excluded from this creative act.

Hence, the artist also played this ambiguous role within the system, as Ukeles herself noticed she

> (…) proposed work that would show the living artist acting out the tension between her artistic freedom—these were her freely chosen choices of activities—and the restrictions of necessity, the trauma she was in the midst of articulating—purposely registering them within the context of art institution whose very essence is to support the works of free expression by artists, yet, being also an inherently conserving institution besides being an "institution" altogether, has to deal with its own sets of restrictive necessities. That was the rub.[44]

Indeed, the artist used her freedom to capture the value of maintenance work in order to transform it into the fixed art object. Ukeles revealed that the artists were responsible also for maintaining the hierarchical structure of the institution, which was additionally stressed by stamping the work that rather caricaturized the Duchampian gesture as a bureaucratic confirmation needed for such a transfer. In this act of institutional critique, she simultaneously exposed the very limits of such a critique that only reveals the inequality that is experienced by everyone every day.

CONSERVATION REPORT FORM

Object:	*Glass Case*
Owner:	*Wadsworth Atheneum*
Acc. No.:	*none available*
Artist:	
Date Examined:	7/20/73
Place Examined:	*Morgan building.*
Provenance:	*20th century.*
Period or Date:	–
Signature:	*none*
Medium:	*didn't painting*
Frame:	*wood*
Primary Support:	–
Secondary Support:	–
Backing Material:	–
Varnish:	–
Dimensions:	75½" (L) × 25⅞" (W.) × 18½" (H)
Previous Treatment:	None
X-Ray Taken:	None
Photos Taken:	b/w
	U.V. –
	I.R. –

Surface Condition:

Dusty. Requires superficial cleaning

Damages:

none.

Recommendations:

Superficial cleaning with windex and soft cloth.

J.P.78. Conservator

Figure 12.4 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object: Mummy Maintenance: With the Maintenance Man, the Maintenance Artist, and the Museum Conservator*, July 20, 1973. Eleven 16 × 20 in. photographs, three 20 × 16 in., and three 11 × 8½ in. handwritten texts. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

However, her creative act was not fully official until the conservator stepped in to write a report. At first, there was the necessary and passive duty of the worker, then the teasing and the "creative act" of the artist and then the finale, culminating in the legitimization sanctioned by the conservator. When it comes to his role, the privilege of finalizing an action rooted in tradition was revealed by the performance. Only active men were endowed with the privilege of concluding an action and, furthermore, transforming it into the object with a defined value: that was the demonstration of an autonomous capacity.[45] Political subjects were those who possessed a voice and the right to act for the mere sake of deploying their capacity. The workers were passive, whereas artists were powerless within the art museum. In such a transfer, the question of the identity of the art work remains problematic as the whole performance was concluded by the conservator, not the artist.

But is this the end? Today in Hartford one would not see the mummy, returned to the mothership that is the Metropolitan Museum, and the glass vitrine itself has never appeared in the museum space as an official work of art. Of course, this was not the point of Ukeles's performance, but still it is emblematic that, in her case, the Duchampian gesture did not convince the institution to objectify it. As if a female artist's declaration that it is an artwork could not be enough. This showed the gender divide between men and women in the assessment and purchase of their work in the 1970s politics of museums. Whereas a male artist's negative gesture of introducing a fountain to the art space (executed more than a half a century earlier, within an even more brass-bound institutional art system) was conserved as a paradoxical object of art, a female artist was deprived of such transformative power: like women in the domestic realm, the vitrine returned to its private necessity of maintenance. But does this mean that the glass vitrine is not a work of art? I am suggesting the possibility of retrieving the object of the performance, not because the vitrine or diaper should be exhibited as a readymade, but to stress the never-ending nature of maintenance and the subversive capacity of depriving institutions of the power to conclude an action as something fixed and static.

Hanna Hölling claims that artworks abide in their present, which is constituted by their many different pasts; they are constructed by their present as much as by their past circumstances.[46] Here, performance is a constant becoming of something different: it establishes a peculiar relation with the past; it constantly actualizes itself in relation to history; it relentlessly changes its ways of existing. Even the illusion of the status quo requires ongoing discipline and performance of control that act upon the object, forcing its constancy over and over again. Trying to move towards a process intervening in Ukeles's *Transfer* temporality, one could ask how to actualize this critical potential in today's art institutions, whose hierarchical structure remains very much the same as it was in the 1970s (which is a kind of a gloomy way of conserving her performance). After all, the critical potential of this performance is to act against the hierarchical structure of the institution by constantly revealing it, to show the bitter aftertaste of its logic, not to sustain it.[47] If the performance was

"paused" by the conservator, this also means that it could be restarted by him or her. The question is: under what economic and social rules of the institution will she or he (they) perform further?

Although the conservation was and is arrested in maintaining hegemonic order and is institutionalized, Ukeles tries to expose those mechanisms to emancipate care as a political force and feminist act of affective and reproductive labor. As Rancière emphasized, emancipation—understood broadly as the changing of the described social codes, norms and roles in order to create a different experience of *the common*—cannot be institutionalized.[48] While it is impossible to change institutions from the outside, he claims it is possible from the inside. He indicates that in the institution there are those who know, who are political subjects (conservators, curators, art historians, educators) and those who don't know, without political subjectivity (maintenance workers and the public). Of course, one cannot ask the institution to abolish that division. And yet, as the philosopher notes, those who exist in the institution can.[49] Those from the inside can separate the process of sharing their knowledge from the presupposition of inequality, and basically this is what emancipation means. After all, the political act of resistance is always a "misuse" and a "point of departure."[50] Maybe the very work against holding the power to end a performance could be a subversive practice? What seemed to be a flat and homogeneous surface of *the common* is a highly stratified structure which could be contested and redesigned from deep inside. That is the potential of radical care and radical conservation.

It is worth adding that in 1973 Hartford's museum was the first museum that allowed Ukeles to perform her actions in its space. Museums were rather suspicious of this new invention that was performance in the 1970s. Furthermore, back then it was rather difficult to accuse the Wadsworth Atheneum of cynically using a new language of art to legitimize its position. Suffice to say that at that time museum staff were not used to confronting artists and the public on an everyday basis, which *The Keeping of the Keys* (another of Ukeles's performance) clearly demonstrated, as she opened museum office doors to visitors or locked museum staff in their spaces. And yet the introduction of Ukeles's performance caused a series of long reactions within the institution, such as the "Matrix" exhibition (1998) that showcased her maintenance performances. During this exhibition, the artist returned to the same spaces in which she had once revealed the general logic of the museum. Subsequently, the museum purchased the photographic documentation as the work of art. Because the performance was captured by means of photographic documentation, the afterlife of Ukeles's performance was reduced to these images as mere evidence of the action from 1973. This also excluded the existence of other archival remnants and their demands for care as well as its performative potential for further critique of maintenance work within art institutions. However, as the conservators noted as a recommendation in the conservation report, the glass case requires "superficial cleaning," leaving possible changes in the status of the art object to conservation itself. It was then that one could see how the very performance about the conservation of

performance was arrested and transformed by different institutional practices and historical narratives that, with time, reshaped even the artist's approach to the work. The very relation between the subject and the object conditions conservation methods and reshapes this relation, enabling different works of care to come into being.

Notes

1 This aspect of care work being subordinated to capitalism and neoliberal governing was recently outlined by The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (New York: Verso, 2021), 9–15.
2 Rogers Victoria, "Maintaining Development: Redefining the Relationship," in *Maintenance Required*, ed. Nina Horisaki-Christens, Andrea Neustein, Victoria Rogers and Jason Waite (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013), 19.
3 On the concept of the distribution of the sensible as an aesthetic and political term, see Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).
4 Barbara Bolt, "Introduction: Toward a 'New Materialism' through the Arts," in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a "New Materialism" through the Arts*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London and New York: I.B. Tauris), 1–13.
5 Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (Winchester: Zer0 Books, 2015).
6 Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, eds., *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 1.
7 In the manifesto, she contrasted two basic systems for Western societies: development (free creation) and maintenance (mundane labor). As a mother, she could not be a free artist, as a free artist, she could not be a maintenance worker, so she combined those two roles into one, with the message that we are all dependent on supporting systems, see Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an exhibition 'Care,'" in Jack Burnham, "Problems of Criticism," *Artforum,* vol. 41 (January 1971): 40–45.
8 Ukeles contacted all of the galleries where *c.7,500* took place and proposed to execute a performance. Six institutions agreed, but not every action was about an art institution. Some of them focused on women's role in private and public space, the cyclical processes of nature or family.
9 Cornelia Butler, ed., *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74* (London: Afterall Books, 2012), 286.
10 Artist Jean Toche even said that "to fight for control of the museum is also to be against the war." Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 18.
11 Nathan Stolow, "Conservation Policy and The Exhibition of Museum Collections," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation 16*, no. 2 (February 1977): 12.
12 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2–3.
13 Mierle Laderman Ukeles in conversation with Alexandra Schwartz, in Butler, *From Conceptualism to Feminism*, 286.
14 The artifact was even nicknamed Mummy Dearest, see Owen McNally, "Bye, Mummy Dearest," *The Hartford Courant,* January 7, 2000, https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-xpm-2000-01-07-0001071136-story.html. The nickname plays with the title of the movie *Mommie Dearest* which presents how strong the connotation of the mummy with a mommy was among Hartford's public.

15 Sherry Buckberrough and Andrea Miller-Keller, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Matrix 137* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1998), 4.
16 For the interpretation of Ukeles's art in terms of social reproduction, see Andreas Petrossiants, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles's Maintenance and/as (Art) Work," *View* 21 (2018), https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2018/21-invisible-labor/mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-andas-art-work.
17 Mierle Laderman Ukeles in *Matrix 137*, Buckberrough and Miller-Keller, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 9.
18 Ukeles often draws attention to this fact. See her conversation with David Duvshani in Tohu Podcast, July 31, 2019, http://tohumagazine.com/article/tohu-podcast-conversation-mierle-laderman-ukeles.
19 Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.
20 On the concept of ritual negotiations, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 33.
21 Patricia C. Philips, ed., *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art* (New York: Prestel, 2016), 50.
22 Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012).
23 Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 165.
24 Philips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 51.
25 Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, "Art of The Possible: An Interview with Jacques Rancière," *Artforum International* 45, no. 7 (2007): 256–261.
26 Maurizio Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 2.
27 Philips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 50.
28 Philips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles*, 50.
29 Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 71–97; Hilary Sample, *Maintenance Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016); Kari Conte, *Seven Work Ballets* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015).
30 Andreas Petrossiants discusses Helen Molesworth's interpretation of the Hartford performances and, according to her, those actions show that maintenance work is essential and done by everyone. Petrossiants stressed that everyone does maintenance, but not everyone is equally paid, if paid at all. Petrossiants, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles's Maintenance and/as (Art) Work."
31 According to Mark Fisher, capitalism is the only possible means of operation and every idea of anti-capitalism is deployed to reinforce the system, see Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zer0 Books, 2009).
32 Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3.
33 Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 7.
34 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2018).
35 Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit*, 419–420.
36 Taylor uses the term "acts of transfer" following Paul Connerton. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 2.
37 Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 31.
38 Andrea Neustein, "Maintenance, Renewal, Decay, Death, Air, Time, Dust, and the Gallery," in *Maintenance Required*, 24.
39 Neustein, "Maintenance, Renewal, Decay," 34.
40 Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).
41 I wish to thank Patricia Hickson, Curator of Contemporary Art Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, for this remark.

42 Jacques Rancière in conversation with Mark Foster Gage, see Mark Foster Gage, ed., *Aesthetics Equals Politics: New Discourses Across Art, Architecture, and Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), 14.
43 Of course, in a specific regime and hierarchy, passiveness, work refusal or doing nothing can be perceived as a political act. This perception depends on the distribution of the senses in the common.
44 Laderman Ukeles in *Matrix 137*, 10–11.
45 Rancière in conversation with Foster Gage, *Aesthetics Equals Politics*, 14.
46 Hanna B. Hölling, "Time and Conservation," in *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints, Copenhagen, 4–8 September 2017*, ed. J. Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museum), 6.
47 Ukeles noted, "I wanted people to see that the logic of the institution creates a bitter aftertaste." Butler, *From Conceptualism to Feminism*, 286.
48 Rancière in conversation with Foster Gage, *Aesthetics Equals Politics*, 24.
49 Rancière in conversation with Foster Gage, *Aesthetics Equals Politics*, 25.
50 Rancière in conversation with Foster Gage, *Aesthetics Equals Politics*, 25.

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13 Living materials

Ethics and principles for embodied stewardship

Cori Olinghouse and Megan Metcalf

Cori Olinghouse and Megan Metcalf began a dialogue in early 2020 about their shared experience working with choreographers and performance artists to document and archive their projects for art institutions and other stakeholders. Uniting Olinghouse's praxis-based perspective as a practitioner with Metcalf's observations as an art historian and theorist, they are building a broad picture of the bodily knowledge required to "conserve" performance. Each has a background in dance and movement as well as creative practice, which provides a foundation for an embodied, artist-centered and collaborative approach to the project of preservation. In this conversation, they use four examples of animating live works from the 1960s, '70s and the present day to explore how such an approach transforms object-based paradigms of collecting and conservation. They also critically assess the evolving vocabulary for this work, which spans art and dance history, museum and archival studies, and conservation theory and practice. Olinghouse has been working in artist archives since 2001 and danced with the Trisha Brown Dance Company from 2002–2006, where she later became the archive director (2009–2018). In 2017, she founded The Portal, which cultivates archiving as a poetic and performative practice and works alongside her creative practice based in improvisational forms rooted in postmodern dance, clowning and social dance. As an artist archivist, Olinghouse works closely with artists to create "living archives"—collaborating on ways of translating, documenting and mapping their creative practices, while also restaging historical performance works.

Metcalf received her PhD in contemporary art from UCLA in 2018 with a dissertation about the entry of dance and other performance forms into museum collections. Her writing addresses the intersection of dance and the visual arts, both in the past and today, and is informed by study with major figures in American dance in the 1960s and a dance career in New York in the early 2000s. Metcalf participated in the process of translating Simone Forti's early performances for exhibition and acquisition by major visual art institutions, which involved learning the works from 1960 and 1961, performing them and observing Forti teaching them to other performers in addition to years of research in Forti's archive; the following conversation focuses on this experience.

In their respective work, Olinghouse and Metcalf noticed that certain competencies had largely been overlooked in the academic literature and even downplayed among archiving and conservation professionals. These "embodied conservation skills" have been developed over decades and even centuries among performance practitioners yet remain invisible and under-theorized, especially in the visual arts. The "Living Materials" conversation builds on these observations to identify a skill set as well as guiding principles for archiving forms with performance elements. Together the speakers generate questions including, what materials, resources and approaches are required to give a future performance vitality and life? How much can a performance change and retain its identity as the same work? How might artists let go of their authorial role in order to let their works live on? And what is the role of a work's community in its ongoing stewardship? Beginning from the premise that dance and other performance forms have inherent strategies for continuation that mitigate against their assumed ephemerality, this dialogue maps rich ground for the conservation of live and other ephemeral, itinerant and transitory artworks, with implications for artworks in more traditional forms.

Project #1

Trisha Brown and Sylvia Palacios Whitman, *Pamplona Stones* (1974)

First performance by Trisha Brown and Sylvia Palacios Whitman at 383 West Broadway, New York, 1974. Subsequently performed at the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College, Connecticut, 1974, The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1974, The MoMing Dance and Arts Center, Chicago, 1974, Trisha Brown's loft at 541 Broadway, New York, 1975, and San José State University, 1975. Reconstructed by Cori Olinghouse at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, New York, 2018.

Pamplona Stones was created and performed in 1974 by Trisha Brown and Sylvia Palacios Whitman. Their humorous eighteen-minute duet consists of serial actions carried out in a nonchalant, deadpan style with a variety of props, accompanied by flat, monotone speech. The objects include two palm-sized rocks, a provisional tent-like structure with a sheet and two poles, and a small mattress, which they arrange and rearrange to make visual and verbal puns. Brown described the work as "a careful distribution of words, objects, and gestures in a large square room with an interplay of ambiguity in language and reference—a multiple theme and variations."[1]

Megan Metcalf: In our respective art history and archiving practices, Cori and I have noticed that the phrase "body-to-body transmission" is increasingly invoked by museums and conservators and curators, but the *how* of that is not often addressed.[2] And that's what we feel intimately involved in. Cori, you've written, "It's essential to be able to qualitatively understand how transmission is taking place, which means attuning to the memory structures that underlie particular forms."[3] I feel this is at the heart of our dialogue today and that "attuning" is

something I find so compelling about your work, Cori.[4] I take it to mean a careful process of observing the sensory details of a work and then finding a way to respond in a receptive feedback loop, which runs through all of your projects.

For example, *Pamplona Stones* was performed just a handful of times in the 1970s. Cori collaborated with the Trisha Brown Dance Company in 2018 to revive/reconstruct this piece (Figure 13.1). This work had fallen out of the repertory (or really had never been a part of the repertory of the company). In a dance company, the "repertory" is the collection of dances that a dance company stewards or holds. "Active repertory" is comprised of the dances the performers currently know and are performing, with other dances from the repertory restaged or "revived" by way of embodied knowledge transfer. This transfer is usually directed by someone who has performed the work in the past: they teach the choreography (sequences of steps, movement patterns and body shapes) to a new generation of dancers, typically drawing on their first-person experience as well as recordings of the work. "Reconstruction" of a dance is generally reserved for circumstances when only fragments of the dance remain, or if a long time has passed since the work has been revived.[5] It was clear early on in *Pamplona Stones* that the usual revival or reconstruction process wasn't going to work for this piece.

Cori Olinghouse: For *Pamplona Stones*, my intention as a restager was to let humor be the guide. For the jokes to register to an audience, the performers

Figure 13.1 Trisha Brown and Sylvia Palacios Whitman, *Pamplona Stones*, 1974, performance by Leah Ives and Amanda Kmett'Pendry, Brooklyn Academy of Music, October 2018. Photography © Stephanie Berger.

Figure 13.2 Choreographic notes by Trisha Brown for *Pamplona Stones*, 1974. "Chronology of Dances," Box 89, Folder 54, Trisha Brown Archives.

would need to learn to follow their own amusements rather than performing the work solely as abstract choreography. Part of my approach was to help the dancers attune to the rhythms and timings between the words, actions and gestures. I had archival material to work from, but it was important for me to spend immersive time with Sylvia Palacios Whitman, whose own relationship to

humor in her performance work was so instrumental to the making of the piece. Sylvia performed early on with Trisha Brown, and in 1974, shared a concert of her own works in Trisha's fifth-floor loft at 541 Broadway. Sylvia was a pivotal force during the performance art of the 1960s and '70s, and she remains active today.[6] Her works are populated by surreal stage props (both found and made), which include: gigantic green hands in *Passing Through* (1977), a smoking tea cup and large animal tail in *Cup and Tail* (1978), life-size drawings and performative constructions such as a human slingshot entitled *Slingshot* (1975), and a water fountain made of bare legs splashing in water.[7] The influence of this visual vocabulary and comedic sensibility on *Pamplona Stones* is clearly evident.

Sylvia and I spent a week together in a residency that I structured as a physicalized oral history process. At that point, Trisha had already passed away and, while I was unable to work with her on *Pamplona Stones*, my experience working with her in the company and with the archive had given me intimate time with her practice and methods. *Pamplona Stones*—a work that took them only two days to create—took the performers and me over a month to reconstruct.

I used Trisha's words as a blueprint or DNA for the work. In her original choreographic notes, she uses phrases like "actions taken, reaction ignored," "puns made, puns respun," "placing things, placing words," "moving around, redistributing parts and things and words." The clues provided in these words and the intimate time spent with Sylvia were instrumental to this process. As a secondary step, I used the words derived from Trisha's choreographic notes as an improvisational score to recover the associative logic and the humorous impulses in the work (Figure 13.2).

MM: The duet is a very stripped down, simple interaction between these two performers. Cori, you have said it involves a negotiation of objects, words, the space and each other. There's not dancing in the sense of elaborate choreography. Your project was to mine the humor of it, not to reproduce the shapes that they were making. Is that a fair summary?

CO: Yes, that was the challenge of it. In the end, I had to adhere to the choreography, which included the shapes, gestures and words. I knew that the only way the performances would be animated was if the syntax of the joke structure was alive in ways that the performers could embody. So much of the spirit of this work emerges from Trisha's and Sylvia's personal relationship: they raised their kids together, they were friends in and out of the studio, and they're both incredibly witty, hilarious people. It reminds me of Lucille Ball and Ethel Mertz from the 1950s American television sitcom "I Love Lucy," the easy banter between friends. Their friendship is impossible to reproduce, and I wasn't interested in asking the performers to mimic or imitate Sylvia and Trisha's affects. Each performer brings their own personality.

I used improvisation to unearth the logic of the work, and to help make this more internal to the performers' own sensibilities. In my practice in general, the possibilities of language have become essential to the way that I reconstruct

performance works. For *Pamplona Stones*, I used a writing practice called "Rinse and Repeat," that was inspired by Trisha's own poetic use of language in her notebooks, which I transmitted to the performers as a way to elicit a thicker description and to attune to the humor. First, a segment of video is observed, then one performer moves continuously for 1–3 minutes. The other performer observes, using free association to describe what they are seeing in writing. At the end of the time period, the observer chooses a few resonant images from their writing as a score for movement. Then, the participants switch roles and the process is repeated.[8]

Some of the phrases the performers and I generated included: "deadpan, but without zombie," "deadpan TV ritual," "doing one action at a time," "weird amounts of dead time," "delayed reactions," "all very anti-climactic." I did this so the performers could internalize certain grammars about the work, while honoring their own agency, perspective and improvisational impulses. Using this process, we made daily improvised versions of *Pamplona Stones* for one another.

I also carried out trial-and-error experiments with video documentation, using a 1974 video reference from the Walker Art Center. I experimented with replicating the forms in the video as choreographic grammar. I found that in trying to reproduce the choreographic gestures, there was a flattening or deadening of the work. Because Trisha and Sylvia are so stripped down, and so elegantly deadpan, it's easy to miss the brightness and pathos operating at the same time. I began to jokingly refer to this process as "dance forensics," which involves the myopic study and mimicry of the details from a recording.

MM: I love this term that you've invented, "dance forensics," because it captures the way some of these reconstructions are done, where a dancer is trying to make herself into an image. For example, Cori, you were telling me that one of your collaborators was looking at the shadows in a video to determine how many steps Sylvia and Trisha had taken. It can get precise, but ultimately that kind of precision doesn't end up in reproducing the work. It produces something else, like the video or the documentation.[9]

What I also love about this project is that you had to figure out what's driving that humor in order to give it life, to make it alive. You mentioned bringing in a "scientist of jokes," Cori, can you say more about that?

CO: Colin Gee, a close friend and collaborator of mine, joined us in rehearsal for one afternoon. He's an interdisciplinary artist working at the intersection of performance and visual art, who trained at the École internationale de théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris and brings knowledge from Commedia Dell'arte and other comedic forms. He's developed a somatic practice related to clowning that, as I understand, looks at the body centers in comedic performers—their head, chest, gut, pelvis—in terms of how they're communicating or inflecting meaning. For example, in Commedia, the clowns holding the highest social status move from the head, the melodrama style originates in the chest, and then the bawdier clowns who are motivated by appetite, which includes sex, money and food, lead from the pelvis. His approach looks at ways of orchestrating meaning using the body

centers rather than narrative, which is important to the *non-sequitur* logic that Sylvia and Trisha embody.

I requested that the Trisha Brown Company film the process of working with Colin since I knew future reconstructions wouldn't follow the same approach. In my work with archives, I often feel like a performer in the archive or ghost in the machine. I deposit new documentation into archives to demonstrate the active feedback loop that exists between the restaging of the work and the existing archive of the work.[10]

MM: Introducing the elements of humor and improvisation gave you the ability to create a new version, which works against the deadening qualities of "dance forensics." Sometimes exactly reproducing something makes a dance or a performance into something else.[11] In order to keep a work from transforming into something else, one may have to change it. This feels oxymoronic, but performance and other live works have a vitality to them that can't be eliminated if the work is to be "preserved."

CO: Yes, and though it's very hard to achieve, my approach with restaging is to avoid destroying dance's unruly impulses. I think every iteration in a performance is a different work, a different performance in some sense. One must balance the inherent details that make a work a work, and then ask how it can further transmute in a way that extends the life of the work.

I know this is something you write about, Megan, this space of interpretation, in terms of Simone Forti's work *See Saw*.

Project #2

Simone Forti, *See Saw* (1960)

First performance by Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer at the Reuben Gallery, New York, 1960. Subsequently re-staged and re-imagined by Forti at L'Attico Gallery, Rome (1969), the Performing Garage, New York (1981), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2004), and the Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (2014), among others. Acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 2015. Re-staged by Luca Frei in Stockholm (2015), Mie Frederikke Christensen and Margaux Parillaud in Middleburg (2016), and Will Rawls and Andros Zins-Browne with Martita Abril in New York (2019), among others.

See Saw *originated in 1960 as a duet on a plywood version of the children's toy. A male and a female performer negotiated the dynamic physical conditions of the see-saw and props such as an apple and an art magazine while playing out a subtle drama of "domestic life," as Forti has described it.*[12] *The work lasted approximately fifteen minutes and stayed in one location in space for the whole duration. Subsequent versions of* See Saw *have both closely resembled and dramatically departed from the version presented in the first performance, with future directors given wide latitude for their interpretations.*

MM: *See Saw* was one of the nine works that were collected by MoMA in 2015. I was fortunate to witness Simone's process of teaching *See Saw* up close

and over time to see a lot of versions of it. This is a work that she directed initially in 1960 with Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer. In Simone's first major museum retrospective in Salzburg in 2014, it seemed she was interested in maintaining a lot of the elements from the 1960 version.

The magazine prop in Figure 13.3 was an element in the 1960 work (Figure 13.3). In Salzburg in 2014, I was able to observe Simone realizing that *See Saw* didn't need to exactly reproduce the elements from that version in order to carry on. In Salzburg, the performers tried working with this prop a number of times and it wasn't working. There were several other contextual factors that also ultimately led Simone to letting three pairs of performers develop their own versions and letting them experiment. Ultimately, she found that the see-saw, i.e., the situation of the setup and the balance and the two performers, was enough of a framework to allow *See Saw* to keep its identity, to keep its integrity as an artwork.

By the time Simone got to the 2015 acquisition by MoMA, she was allowing people to direct it in their own way, which lets *See Saw* transmute into other things as it continues into the future. In the version with Mie Frederikke Christensen and Margaux Parillaud in Middleburg in 2016, the two performers added a huge lump of clay, smashing it and spreading it around the room. The interaction between the performers and the clay was physical and embodied; the clay became another performer, almost, in this version.

Figure 13.3 Rehearsal of Simone Forti's *See Saw* (1960) at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, July 2014. Photograph by Megan Metcalf.

In 2019, Will Rawls and Andros Zins-Browne did *See Saw* for the MoMA exhibition *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done* (Figure 13.4). This version took on issues having to do with immigration and borders. Their ability to interpret the score as they saw it allowed them to connect to issues that they saw as urgent. They also invited in a third collaborator, Martita Abril, who was translating their words into Spanish. In a short blurb about the project, the artists wrote:

> Will Rawls and Andros Zins-Browne's remix of Simone Forti's seminal work, *See Saw* (1960) employs an object associated with balance to examine issues of power, inequality, and trust. At the time that this work was performed in 2019, the United States was in a fierce debate over the status of immigrants. The policies of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, regarding the separation, detention and expulsion of migrant bodies, including children, created a moment to reflect and respond to ideas of equality— which bodies belong, and which do not, which bodies are valuable, and by whose standards…in this 'Domestic Drama,' Rawls and Zins-Browne's interaction unfolds as something akin to that on a playground: an impossible game with unclear rules and abstract intentions, where the winners often seem arbitrary, and the players risk their lives and bodies in order to play.[13]

Figure 13.4 Simone Forti's *See Saw* (1960), developed and performed by Will Rawls and Andros Zins-Browne with Martita Abril in January 2019 at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Photograph by Paula Court. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

A lot of the improvisation Will and Andros developed had to do with talking out loud to Simone, letting her know how they had come up with their version. The artists were very explicit about the fact that they were changing *See Saw* and making a "domestic drama" extend to issues of national concern. At a certain point, they took off the main plank of the see-saw and were using it as a border wall to corral people into small spaces. In this way, they were able to capitalize on or tap into the wildness in the work—dance's inherent unruliness—and give *See Saw* a new set of meanings for a new political moment.

CO: There are innumerable ways to structure the process of transmission. Megan, I remember you saying that Simone intentionally chose the transmitter to be a director. And that that person could be another artist and essentially have the agency to somewhat remake the work. Is "body-to-body transmission" just too general of a catchall phrase? In your example, Simone's already sculpting the work's futurity by choosing that this person be in the role of a director (rather than a teacher or reconstructor). Do you have more to say about that?

MM: Yes, she says it could be any kind of artist. In Will's and Andros's case, they're both choreographers, but it could be an architect or a sculptor, or some other kind of artist. Simone's specifications for the continuation of *See Saw* in the documents undergirding the MoMA acquisition are rather open in that regard. But she specifies that the artist taking on *See Saw* must have a strong creative vision. I find Simone's way of thinking about the continuation of *See Saw* inspiring, because it recognizes that somebody in the future might have more to say with the work. She trusts that the work will maintain its integrity because of its physical structure and its narrative possibilities. By letting the artwork loose in the world, Simone believes in the see saw's potential to continue to create a meaningful event.

While Simone's Dance Constructions (the performance works collected by MoMA) have some elements of improvisation in them, they're quite restrictive in terms of their choreography and their steps. They don't have choreography, strictly speaking, but they're very object-like, which is one reason why they seemed appropriate to collect by a museum. It's striking because the rest of Simone's career was grounded in improvisation.

I initially observed Simone teaching *See Saw* like repertory, and then she departed from that. Her change in approach made it clear that her vision for the work's future was being worked out on the ground, and that there were surprises in store—as in an improvisation. *See Saw* being taken on by another director enacts one of those surprises.

CO: When I think inside of improvisational systems, I sense that there's a sociality to what's happening, which includes multiple valences of listening. I perceive form as being very much alive. This is akin to the way performance works are mutable—shape-shifting and evolving over multiple iterations. Megan, since we both have a background in improvisation, and because the artists we've worked with are deeply embedded in improvisation, we are convinced that the field of conservation could learn from improvisational systems.

MM: Trisha [Brown] has some beautiful words about improvisation. Describing the use of improvisation in her process of dance-making, she said,

if…you just turn the lights out and go gah-gah in circles, that would be therapy or catharsis or your happy hour, but if in the beginning you set a structure and decide to deal with X, Y, and Z materials in a certain way… that is an improvisation within set boundaries. That is the principle, for example, behind jazz.[14]

This word ["improvisation"] often invokes "Oh, do whatever you want." But there's deep structure in improvisation. Which leads me to think, what drives the creativity in these projects? What drives their ability to stay alive? There is a structure there that can be uncovered.

I know that attuning to both the sociality and the wildness of a living form was something you also had to do, Cori, with The Studio Museum in Harlem's first acquisition of performance, Autumn Knight's *WALL*. You collaborated with Autumn and the museum on restaging and documenting the work in 2019.

Project #3

Autumn Knight, *WALL* (2016)

The first iteration of *WALL* was created during Knight's Galveston Artist Residency in 2014 in Galveston, Texas. The iteration acquired by The Studio Museum in Harlem emerges from the performance at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston in Texas on January 30, 2016. Subsequently staged at Danspace Project, New York as part of *Autumn Knight: WALL* on October 5–6, 2019. Precursors to *WALL* include Knight's works *Two Blocks* (2014), *Strong Words, Limp Bodies* (2014) and *lágrimas negras* (2013). Acquired by The Studio Museum of Harlem in 2017.

WALL gathers an intergenerational cast of Black femmes in a ritual-based performance layered with sounds and actions. Wearing various shades of electric blue and seated in a line, the performers gaze past the audience while carrying out small gestures. Two participants sit close together, holding hands, while others grind fragrant herbs, such as cardamom, lavender, rosemary or fresh lilies with a stone. Behind them, two women in red perform the actions of wall building, simulating bricklaying, stacking and bulldozing. One of the women in red sings a song about walls. The work is approximately 35 to 45 minutes long.

CO: Autumn Knight is an interdisciplinary artist working between performance, text, video and installation with a background in drama therapy and improvisation, who often shapes social spaces and dynamics through a participatory lens. At the end of each artist's residency at the Studio Museum— Autumn was in residence in 2016–2017—the Studio Museum asks the artist to contribute a work to their permanent collection. Autumn works in performance, so she requested that they collect, for the first time, a work in that discipline. That conversation went on for a couple years before I was brought in as a collaborator.

Autumn asked the Studio Museum to work with a specialist familiar with dramaturgy, choreography, embodied practice and conservation issues for the processes of archiving and acquisition. I joined the acquisition project in that capacity, helping the Studio Museum to develop their infrastructure in support of collecting performance, and to collaborate on contextual documentation. I also assisted with the staging of this work at Danspace Project in 2019 (Figure 13.5).[15]

The process of acquiring and archiving Autumn's contemporary performance work at the Studio Museum in 2019 was very distinct from MoMA's acquisition of Simone's historic works in 2015. Autumn was not coming to this institutional project as a late career stage artist, where much had already been documented or where a full pedagogy or teaching had already been described around this particular work. MoMA's acquisition process took around six years; the process between myself and Autumn took six months. It is a difference in scale that points also to economic disparities and priorities between the two institutions.

The Studio Museum team and I had never seen *WALL* performed live. The first version of *WALL* was performed as part of Autumn's Galveston Art Residency in Galveston, Texas in 2014. The iteration acquired by the Studio Museum was performed two years later at the Contemporary Arts Museum

Figure 13.5 Autumn Knight, *WALL* (2016/2019). Performance, total run time approximately forty-five minutes. Danspace Project, New York, NY. Mia Matthias, Natasha L. Turner, Sixx Teague, Sydney Rodriguez, Krystique Bright, Mzuri Hudson, Sandra Parris, Shelly Montrose, Leila Fuentes, Autumn Knight, Tanisha Jones and Niala Epps. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the Acquisition Committee 2017.4. Photograph © 2019 Paula Court.

Houston in 2016. By the time Autumn and I started working together, she mentioned that she'd never been asked to talk about this work. She was also interested in the work's continued creative development.

Different kinds of inquiry and research are required when an artist is involved in the becoming of the work, rather than feeling like it is finished or far in the past. My work is often deeply situated in an artist's creative process. I wanted to avoid handing Autumn a series of questionnaires. Instead, I chose to work directly with her to excavate the concepts and embodied languages inherent in the work.[16] Eliciting the embodied principles is one way to lay the ground or create a four-dimensional picture of what needs to be thought about for the future transmission of a work. In this instance, I knew that much of the work's knowledge exists in a deeply embodied state. It was going to require a call-and-response dialogue between the two of us to start to map this out on paper in a way that wouldn't calcify or deaden its own logic.[17]

MM: You definitely couldn't get into "dance forensics" here. *WALL* is a complex and deep work but isn't choreographically complicated. The meaning of it isn't in any kind of tricky steps or poses or rhythms or shapes.

CO: In each location, Autumn brings together an intergenerational cast of Black femme participants. At Danspace Project, the youngest person was 15 and the oldest was around 70 years old, offering multiple senses of time—embodied, lived time—in the room.

My aim was to avoid treating the work as a choreographic object, which would bring an analytical focus to the work's formal unfolding as a dance or movement sequence, rather than on the *process* of creation and performance. Part of the learning was to understand *how* the work behaves as a form of social action. I began inquiring into the ways Autumn works with the participants, and how she creates a social space of care in both the work itself and in the creation of it, which essentially is what the work is about (Figure 13.6). Within the work, the participants, seated in cobalt blue, form a line, which acts as a physicalized wall for holding grief as opposed to an architectural wall like the Western Wall or "Wailing Wall" in Jerusalem. Behind them, two women in red perform the actions of wall building, gesturing to the labor required to construct a sanctuary of care. To create this, Autumn uses a sensitive interpersonal process to elicit the gestures and actions.

At Danspace, she structured the transmission process as an open workshop. After relaying the concept of the work and taking time to meet the participants, Autumn began by asking everyone to form a wall in the space. She walked down the wall of seated participants and—using her drama therapy background—she engaged in a nonverbal call-and-response process to identify what she calls each person's "unconscious gesture." Since the work is durational, Autumn wanted the unconscious gestures to be comfortable, so each person can repeat them for 35 to 45 minutes. There's a lot of listening that happens in the staging of the work.

Figure 13.6 Autumn Knight, *WALL* (2016/2019). Performance, total run time approximately forty-five minutes. Danspace Project, New York, NY. Natasha L. Turner and Autumn Knight. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the Acquisition Committee 2017.4. Photograph © 2019 Paula Court.

Collaborating with Autumn to create documentation for the Studio Museum, I used an embodied oral history process that combined discussion, dramaturgy and visual mapping to uncover how Autumn transmits embodied material to performers. In this scenario, my effort was to uncover how she identifies each person's unconscious gestures. We made incredible discoveries through our conversations. Something I identified was what I called "telescoping," which is related to drama therapy's concepts of distancing. As I understand it, the therapist works with the patient/client to either break down a wall or to create more of a boundary based on how much information or intimacy somebody is enabling or not enabling.

Many complex details are involved in how Autumn sculpts these social spaces beginning from an ethics of care. Again, as an artist/archivist collaborator, I was attuning to the memory structures in the work. The labor was to unearth what was already happening, knowing that in the future, Autumn may not be directing the work.

MM: In this example, you worked in an intimate process to discover details about the form of the work, about both its creation and its eventual manifestation, in a way, doing a documentation of it. If a museum is going to collect a performance, the people involved must understand what is collected. It sounds like major discoveries were made in the process of defining what this work is –perhaps that Autumn hadn't realized herself.

CO: I am always looking to establish an active feedback loop between the archiving of the work and the creative development of the work itself. That's the lens that I brought to this project. Documentation isn't just about taking photographs and video. For me, as someone who's also performed in a lot of historical works, certain kinds of documents have the capacity to act as a retrieval system for the senses, which mean something to the nervous system, even in the texture of the words or the poetics or the language.[18]

Autumn has a lot to say about the relationship between the body and language. She wanted "the script to tell stories," drawing also from Malcolm X's instruction to "make it plain" in an effort to make the language accessible and straightforward to a range of people. There was an artistic and collaborative dimension to the way Autumn and I approached the documentation, thinking of documents as an extension of transmission. We used a process I've originated called "visual mapping," which involves sketching out the elements and concepts of WALL. We laid out a long roll of paper and spent two days mapping. I directed Autumn to use a stream-of-consciousness approach to marking out the compositional structure, concepts and embodied details of the work. From there, I asked her to talk about each of those elements, which we recorded and I later edited and transcribed. There are now four edited transcriptions of our three-month process held in the Studio Museum's archive.

In December 2019, a group met at the Studio Museum to further discuss the process for loaning out the work. I asked the conservators and curators to read through the transcripts, knowing that, while it was a lot of material to sift through, it contained clues for how to steward the work.

The transcripts became their own form of transmission—a way to relay the discovery process between Autumn and me to the institution, giving a deeper picture of the work. Ideas of elasticity, call-and-response and modularity informed our discussion of how to structure the acquisition itself. I'm often looking for the form of the archive or framework of an acquisition to have a kinship with or to mirror the way an artist is working. The challenge of approaching the "preservation" or "conservation" of live works this way means that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. It has to be an immersive, embodied, improvisational process with each artist, potentially.

Simone Forti's most famous work *Huddle* has an acquisition structure that was uniquely formulated for the work. Megan, you have written about the ways the acquisition rewrites terms of ownership, in that the work continues to have a "life of its own" even now that it is in a museum's collection. Can you talk about *Huddle*'s model? Could it be instructive for other acquisitions of dance by art museums?

Project #4

Simone Forti, *Huddle* (1961)

First shown in performance in May 1961 in Yoko Ono's studio loft, New York. Subsequently taught and performed by Forti and its performers, especially

members of the dance community, on countless occasions in innumerable places. Acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 2015.

Huddle *is a cluster of 5–7 people who climb over each other one at a time for approximately ten minutes. The climbing is a straightforward action that happens in no particular order, with the group constantly reorganizing to support the next climber.*

MM: Simone Forti's *Huddle* exemplifies a continuation plan that is based on the form of the work itself and is driven by the work's community. *Huddle* also literalizes how dance is both a way of knowing and an identifiable thing.[19] It's an object that's made by people climbing over it, and the support is constantly shifting to support the climber (Figure 13.7). *Huddle* was included as part of MoMA's acquisition, but from the very beginning of Simone's discussions with the museum, she insisted that no one could exclusively own the work. *Huddle* had circulated for decades in the dance community and because its knowledge is easily transmissible, it had widely spread. Simone felt that there would be a value in its continued transmission outside of institutional structures. *Huddle*'s acquisition by MoMA would have to contend with this idea that the work had been shared for so long, it couldn't be exclusive property.

Figuring out how non-exclusive ownership would work in practice was tricky. In the final agreement, the acquisition allows for *Huddle* to take place in informal contexts, so that practitioners are also stewards of the work in

Figure 13.7 Rehearsal of Simone Forti's *Huddle* (1961) at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, July 2014. Photograph by Megan Metcalf.

addition to MoMA. One can imagine a situation where, for whatever reason (like when museums were closed because of the pandemic), *Huddle* couldn't get shown in a museum for a considerable time. Simone's arrangement makes it so that *Huddle* can still live on in groups of practitioners who enact it on their own.

There's evidence of this happening since the acquisition. MoMA can also help the community of performers by recording and maintaining documentation of *Huddle* and staging new Huddles for exhibitions. Every time MoMA trains teachers or trains performers, those performers can share it with their own communities as a way to enact collective care. The two stewards—the "museum" and the "community" (and all the people they consist of)—ultimately have to work together.

Hanna Hölling (moderator): I'd like to know whether dance as a way of knowing is intrinsically bound to institutions, where certain forms of knowledge transmission and continuity are enabled or are possible. And what happens outside or on the margins, so to speak, of those institutions?

CO: We might want to invert the question of what it means for a museum to acquire performance to instead ask, how can the museum learn from performance's own inherently complex structures? How can museums expand their infrastructures to be more plastic and mutable the way performance is?

A lot of the thinking that undergirds what I do in archives is based on the improvisational research and study that I've done inside of social dance forms. In part because there's a different structure of ownership. A form like voguing, which isn't owned by a single author, but formed socially through intersecting communities, maintains its liveness in the way it mutates, moves and transforms—constantly shape-shifting over time.

Voguing is a perfect example. "Old Way" emerges pre-1990s as a style characterized by two-dimensional fashion poses, Egyptian hieroglyphs, military movements, and symmetrical shapes and geometries. Post-1990s, "New Way" starts to involve the illusory joint articulation and contortion associated with "clicks" and "arm control." Yet they share a deep DNA, which in part is the social responsibility for the ways forms are actively negotiated within a community, while also challenged and extended.[20] I think there's a lot to learn from call-and-response forms emerging out of Black vernacular practices.

By interrogating institutional infrastructures, Autumn Knight's performance work bridges these questions within institutional spaces. In Spring 2020, she completed a month-long residency (right after the COVID shutdown) at The Kitchen in New York City, where she inhabited The Kitchen's building and treated it "as her collaborator, investigating its maintenance through performance."[21] And with *WALL*, the acquisition itself required the Studio Museum to expand its institutional infrastructure, which was part of our collaboration.

MM: I agree about the need for institutions to turn outward and expand their borders. Part of that is listening and learning—taking in lessons and ancestral knowledge from intangible cultural heritage, but also longstanding performance forms like dance. Ballet has been around for hundreds of years,

and it has managed to persist as a practice and a performance without museums looking after it. Folk dances have roots reaching back much, much further.

CO: Some of the institutional examples we've talked about came out of white postmodern forms. But, so much of where performance derives its ways of knowing are through deeper histories of orality, ritual and storytelling.

MM: Where objects and where written records were foreclosed for many reasons—some of them incredibly violent and repressive.

Jules Pelta Feldman (moderator): What does it mean to preserve a work that is tied to a specific body or specific bodies?

MM: Dance is one of the performance forms that, because it can be repeated and has a choreography, has a logic of continuance built into it over a long time. In dance, one knows something will always be lost, so there's not as much angst around that. And there's a deep reverence for the people who've originated certain roles. This is often held as part of the institutional and collective knowledge, in terms of which roles can be reinhabited and which roles are forever gone.

Pamplona Stones is a great example, because this work hadn't been reconstructed as part of the Trisha Brown Dance Company's repertory. And that was exactly the issue: Trisha and Sylvia's chemistry can't be reproduced, which is what lends itself to Cori's approach—mining for the humor and improvisation structures.

But ultimately, some of those decisions, if not made by the artists, are helped to be made by the artist's community. Whether certain roles can be inhabited again later, like Martha Graham's roles were within a modern dance paradigm. Early on in my research into the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, I found there were roles originally danced by Cunningham that nobody else had ever taken on until a certain dancer came along. And the custodians of that work— or maybe even it was Cunningham himself—then said, "Oh, this person can do that" and the works with those roles were performed again.

In visual art performance, a certain artist's or person's identity may be essential to the work's meaning, which distinguishes it from a dance work where roles can be shared and inhabited. Considerable controversy arose in 2011 when Marina Abramović proposed that hired performers "reperform" pieces that had previously been executed only by herself and her former partner, Ulay. Many believed these works could only ever happen in the 1970s and that Abramović absolutely had to be performing her own performance works. Does making the performance over into something more choreographic lose what was important about it in the first place? In instances where the identity factors are specific, which can be cultural identity, racial identity, class identity, gender and/or sexuality, the answer might be "no," the performance work can't be inhabited by somebody else.

CO: I think that performance works *are* tied to the specificity of the performers, even with dance. There's always an inherent failure in trying to revisit a historical work. I try to take up that space of failure in a generative way. With *Pamplona Stones*, I tried to make the distinction of not asking the performers to replicate Sylvia and Trisha's mannerisms and gestures as choreographic form.

This was to avoid turning them into objects. For me, it's about having an underlying methodology that helps to attune the wildness in the work that gives it continued life past when certain performers are gone.

Pauline Oliveros describes "quantum performance" as always being a composer, a player and the listener simultaneously.[22] When I'm directing performers, I try to help them inhabit that sensibility. If they can inhabit set choreography as a composer, player and listener simultaneously, there's a different animate sense to what's happening than if they're just trying to replicate something from video.

Natilee Harren (from the audience): I wonder how this squares with conservation's mandate of reversibility. How does reversibility apply to dance and to performance?[23]

CO: This is one aspect of my practice that I'm critiqued on, because I am adding interpretation to the works by way of revisiting and reimagining them. Performance operates differently than with a painting or another object-derived work because performance is inherently unstable—shape-shifting with each iteration.[24] It's about being conscious about one's own subjectivity and interpretation that's being added, rather than assuming there's a supposed neutrality.

This work with living practices is relational, intimate and "regenerative." That's what I'm attempting in terms of what happens to the archive from the performance or the reimagining of a performance. It's also understanding that memory intelligences and embodied knowledge formations don't always live in objects and documents. Sometimes there's no past material to rely on, which means something new can be generated. This requires a creative exploration around documentation practices in general. I think of this as a living archive framework that is open-ended, adaptive, responsive, modular. Rather than assuming fixity, there's something fluid in the way memory can be captured over time.

With Autumn Knight's project, the artist and I looked at the preexisting documentation from previous iterations of *WALL*, including her notes, photographs and video materials. We were also generating new documentation that would live in the Studio Museum's archive. Again, that's partly why I draw from an improvisation framework, because it allows me to think of form as living. I use the word "regenerative" to connote a way of approaching living systems, which requires tending to a sense of life force or sentience in performance works.

MM: I take my job as a historian to be the role of a steward. Acknowledging my own subjectivity is part of that role, but also the subjectivities of all the people who are involved in the life of an artwork. I understand the social life of an artwork as quite expanded, and I feel this understanding goes hand-in-hand with the idea of documenting the documentation, where keeping track of who is making records is a critical part of the process. I start from the place that failure and loss are generative: they have possibility and plentitude rather than destroying the project or making it impossible. I think this is where Cori and I are both starting from.

MM and CO: By way of conclusion, we offer some synthetic points concerning the process of conserving performance works, particularly in art institutions.

Synthesis

Involve embodied practitioners in acquisition, documentation and conservation processes. Not all embodied knowledge is the same, and not all bodily skills and intelligences are the same. Identifying that embodied knowledge is needed, and what kind is needed, is crucial to the ongoing life of performance works. For example, the "replication committee" at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York consists of conservators, curators, archivists, a lawyer and a registrar—but lacks important competencies without a performance specialist.[25] Likewise, the Tate's "Live List" mentions specialized skills such as singing and dance but does not discuss embodied knowledge in any detail in its recommendations.[26] Important steps have been taken to include artists and other specialists in these institutional processes, especially through the process of gathering artist interviews, but embodied practitioners are just starting to be acknowledged.

  Acknowledge the artwork's larger community, especially that of performance. Performances are made out of social material: dance communities, communities defined by variable identity markers, geographically-bound communities. When an artwork is acquired, this expands to include the institutional community. Taking care of the work thus requires taking care of the work's communities.

  Recognize the embodied knowledge already held by the institution. This may be found in unexpected places, and is also applicable to artworks that are not performances. Learning the physicality that is inherent to an artwork can happen through a number of unconventional sources, such as preparators, invigilators and security guards (who in the US are most often working-class people of color). People who are in the gallery with artworks have a lot of physical knowledge about those works that is often overlooked in conservation and curatorial processes.

  Recognize the generative or regenerative performance stewardship that is already happening in performance practice. This includes understanding the way memory is a medium that takes place within, between, and through bodies. Adapt or adopt the procedures that have kept performances alive over time outside of the institution into the institution, rather than—or in addition to—requiring performance practices to become more object-like in order to enter the institution.

  As one example, social dance forms embody and acknowledge the form's own lineage and the multiple people who have been part of extending that lineage. Instead of an "original" company or "original" work, there are *originators*. Each dancer carries a social responsibility for being accountable to lineage, and there are stakes to performing stolen movements that can result in "vocal, corporeal, and immediate" responses by dancers in the context of a battle, cypher, club or ball, where people clap and cheer each other on as well as audibly or physically call out those who don't demonstrate and further innovate the skills of particular movements.[27] House dancer Brahms "Bravo" LaFortune says, "If you're gunna bite it, you better eat it" and club legend

Archie Burnett says, "It better be vogue and not vague...hip-hop not hip hope." This active negotiation of lineage within particular communities is part of a form's continued survival and transmission; movements behave as mnemonic reserves that are passed and kept alive corporeally.

Mindfulness around attribution in other contexts creates clarity around the artist's authorship and other people who are re-imagining a work and its legacy. Examples of the attempt at translating the logic used in social dance into archival spaces might serve as guidance for a variety of stakeholders and stewards of performance and dance.[28]

In short, the project of preserving performance is intersubjective, process-based and artist-driven. It pays attention to its audience and it is dialogic in the sense of listening to the work as well as the work's community, including the artist. **At its best, the embodied preservation of performance demonstrates how conservation can operate through networks of people to become a redistributive project.**

Notes

1 Quoted in *Trisha Brown—Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961–2001,* ed. Roland Aeschlimann, Hendel Teicher and Maurice Berger (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, 2002), 316.

2 Theater and performance scholar Rebecca Schneider has theorized "body-to-body transmission" in relation to the ways performance resists disappearance, attributing the term to archivists Mary Edsall and Catherine Johnson. It is foregrounded throughout Schneider's important book *Performing Remains,* which describes how movement and affect pass from one body to another through discipline, skill and in-person contact, keeping embodied works alive across generations *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011). The term has been adopted since by curators such as Stuart Comer and historians such as Susan Rosenberg, who have used it to encompass a broad range of operations in dance and performance. See Nancy Lim, "MoMA Collects: Simone Forti's *Dance Constructions,*" http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2016/01/27/moma-collects-simone-fortis-dance-constructions and Susan Rosenberg, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2016).

3 Cori Olinghouse, "A Letter to the Future," in *Performing Memory: Corporeality, Visuality, and Mobility after 1968,* ed. Luisa Passerini and Dieter Reinisch (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2023), forthcoming.

4 Olinghouse draws this term in part from affect theorist Kathleen Stewart's concept of "atmospheric attunements," which account for the ways lived sensory experiences have "rhythms, valences, moods, sensations, tempos, and lifespans." Stewart writes, "How do people dwelling in them become attuned to the sense of something coming into existence?" See Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 3 (2011): 445–453.

5 In most dance scholarship, using "reconstruction" or "reenactment" to describe the restaging of a dance emphasizes the passage of time and the dance's evolution in the process. See, for example, Mark Franko, "Repeatability, Reconstruction, and Beyond," *Theatre Journal* 41, no. 1 (March 1989): 56–74. Also see Kim Jones's account in "American Modernism: Reimagining Martha Graham's Lost *Imperial Gesture* (1935)," *Dance Research Journal* 47, no. 3 (December 2015): 51–69, for another perspective on approaching the reconstruction process.

6 The authors hold deep respect for the female-identified artists discussed in the following examples, i.e: Trisha Brown, Sylvia Palacios Whitman, Simone Forti and Autumn Knight. We use their first names in our dialogue as an indicator of the intimacy that we have had working with them personally and to register the intimacy that performing this kind of embodied history and archiving requires.

7 See Jay Sanders and J. Hoberman, *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama: Manhattan, 1970–1980* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013).

8 "Rinse and Repeat" was developed around 2012 by Olinghouse's collaborator and former Trisha Brown dancer Neal Beasley and was inspired by Trisha Brown's work *Rinse Variations* in which she transcribed the choreography of *Locus* (1975) in writing and gave it to a group of artists to generate their own movement phrase. "Rinse" refers to the way that this "waters down" the *Locus* phrase, removing it further from the original version. The creation and identification of these strategies took place within the framework of "Transmissions," a guide for an interdisciplinary arts curriculum that Olinghouse organized for the Trisha Brown Dance Company in 2017.

9 Art historian Hal Foster's formulation of "zombie time" presciently describes the outcome of restaging performances and dances from the 1960s and '70s using "dance forensics" in art museums.

> Not quite live, not quite dead, these reenactments have introduced a zombie time into these institutions. Sometimes this hybrid temporality, neither present nor past, takes on a gray tonality, not unlike that of old photographs on which the reenactments are often based, and like these photos the events seem both real and unreal, documentary and fictive.
> (*Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London: Verso, 2015), 127)

10 For a creative exploration of "the ghost in the machine," see Cori Olinghouse's film project with Shona Masarin, *Ghost line* (2013): https://theportal.place/p/ghost-line-itinerant. For more information about Trisha Brown's archive, see Siobahn Burke, "Watching a Choreographer Build: Trisha Brown's Unusual Archive," *New York Times*, September 16, 2020.

11 Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) provides an example of the transformation that takes place when learning a performance straight from video. In 1978, Rainer performed the dance for historian Sally Banes, which was recorded on film by dance photographer Robert Alexander. Rainer later regarded her rendition as a poor example of the dance, as she had stopped dancing regularly herself in 1978 and it had been over a decade since the creation of *Trio A*. Rainer has warned would-be restagers of the dance that they need precise instruction from her or one of her authorized "transmitters" in order to learn and perform *Trio A*—and that the versions derived from the widely circulated documentation are different works altogether, not *Trio A*. "*Trio A*: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation," *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 12–18, later updated by the artist in 2011 in an unpublished version.

12 Forti used this phrase in the artist statements appended to MoMA's Department of Media and Performance Art questionnaire, completed by Jason Underhill (September 16, 2016), 4.

13 Andros Zins-Browne, "See Saw, 1960" (2019), *The Great Indoors*: http://www.thegreatindoors.be/index.php?/projects/see-saw-1960-2019.

14 Brown quoted in Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962–1964* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 20.

15 The artist, the Studio Museum, Olinghouse and other collaborators discussed the notions of restaging, reperformance and reenactment in a meeting on December 5, 2019. Knight and Olinghouse suggested taking out the "re" when describing

instances of *WALL* to make the performances more active, pointing towards the future rather than the past.

16 In 2012–2014, the Tate formed a research network called Collecting the Performative, examining performance conservation practices. They developed several blank templates, including a "Performance Specification," an "Activation Report" and a "Map of Interactions" which captures written information about the artwork, the work in action and the network of relations. See Louise Lawson, Acatia Finbow and Hélia Marçal, "Developing a Strategy for the Conservation of Performance-based Artworks at Tate," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 42, no. 2 (May 2019): 114–134. Additionally, time-based media conservator Joanna Phillips developed a process called "iteration reporting," which includes documentation for the artwork, artist-provided installation instructions, an interview with the artist and correspondence with the artist and further research and reference materials. Phillips, "Reporting Iterations: A Documentation Model for Time-based Media Art," *Revista de História da Arte* 4 (2015): 169–177.

17 For the process of mapping, see Olinghouse, "A Letter to the Future."

18 Theories and methodologies for approaching archives and conservation from an embodied perspective are outlined in Cori Olinghouse, "Mapping the Unruly: Imagining a Methodology for the Archiving of Performance," (MA thesis, Wesleyan University, 2017).

19 For dance's operational principle and epistemic dimension, see Megan Metcalf, "Making the Museum Dance: Simone Forti's *Huddle* (1961) and its Acquisition by The Museum of Modern Art," *Dance Chronicle* 45 no. 1 (February 2022): 30–56. See also Metcalf, "In the New Body: Simone Forti's Dance Constructions (1960–61) and their Acquisition by the Museum of Modern Art" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2018), 151.

20 In *Choreographing Copyright*, dance historian Anthea Kraut writes about the "alternative system of copyright" that operates inside social dance cultures. Referring to the attribution systems developed between dancers in the 1930s in New York, which continue today with such forms as voguing, she writes,

> [J]azz and tap dancers effectively registered these moves with their peers, who in turn protected their informal copyrights by collectively policing the performances they observed. The fact that the policing was enacted physically—rather than … sending a cease and desist letter—suggests how critical embodiment was to this system.
>
> (141)

As Lindy Hopper Frankie Manning put it, "If another person learned your step … it could spread, and the dance could advance … If we couldn't steal, I don't think Lindy hopping would have lasted as long" (quoted in Kraut, 135). Kraut, *Choreographing Copyright: Race, Gender, and Intellectual Property Rights in American Dance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

21 The Kitchen, "Autumn Knight" in The Kitchen Onscreen, https://onscreen.thekitchen.org/autumn-knight.

22 See JoAnne Juett, "Pauline Oliveros and Quantum Sound," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 6, no. 2 (October 2010), 9.

23 In "The Custodians," Ben Lerner summarized reversibility thus: "the guiding ethos of conservators is 'reversibility'—making sure that the future has the right to a different version of the past." Lerner, "The Custodians," *The New Yorker*, January 11, 2016, 53.

24 The spectrum created by objects at one end and events at the other was invoked in the conference directly preceding this event, "Performance: The Ethics and Politics of Care #1. Mapping the Field," May 29–30, 2021, hosted by Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge and supported by SNSF. See also Hanna B. Hölling's

edited volume, *Object—Event—Performance: Art, Materiality, and Continuity since the 1960s* (New York, NY: Bard Graduate Center, 2021).

25 Described in Lerner, 50–59.

26 Pip Laurenson et al., "The Live List: What to Consider When Collecting Live Works," Collecting the Performative Network, January 24, 2014, http://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/collecting-performative/live-list.

27 Kraut, 141.

28 See, for instance, Olinghouse's maps of searchable content in the Trisha Brown Dance Company's audiovisual database which were created in collaboration with David Thomson to map Brown's choreographic forms into a vocabulary that can be searched and accessed. Olinghouse transcribed notes made by Carolyn Lucas, Brown's choreographic assistant for over thirty years, in which Lucas gave names to different sections and phrase materials that can be searched in the video content of the dances. Olinghouse also collaborated with Trisha Brown Dance Company archivist Benjamin Houtman who added a field called "naming provenance" that said "Carolyn Lucas," to indicate the point of origin for these names, which can be expanded to include other names and interpretations in the future.

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14 Precarious movements

Contemporary dance as contemporary art

Erin Brannigan and Louise Lawson

> To give form to the precarious.
>
> <div align="right">Thomas Hirshhorn</div>

In the mid-twentieth century, artists began creating intermedial experiments between dance and the visual arts. Now common in performance practices, dance and choreography have in the twenty-first century appeared with increasing frequency in art galleries and museums. Given the rate of increased activity in the field, this can only accelerate, propelled by artistic developments, curatorial inquiries and critical developments associated with a reinvention of the museum. However, processes and protocols concerning performance conditions specific to choreography, curatorial and conservation practices, along with associated theoretical work, are struggling to catch up. Choreographic experts meet museum workers on uneven ground, where corporeal intelligence and undisciplined knowledges that have skirted around institutionalization challenge the traditional values of object-based systems. Precarious Movements: Choreography and the Museum (2021–2024) is a project funded by the Australian Research Council that aims to bring artists, researchers and institutions into dialogue about best practices to support both the choreographer and the museum, and to sustain momentum in theory and practice around dance and the visual arts. Among the project's intended outcomes are open-access guidelines and toolkits due for release in 2024. These will be informed by industry consultation (through interviews and a survey) that is artist-led, including key case studies supported through multiple stages, from commission to conservation and collecting.

In this chapter, dance theorist Erin Brannigan and conservator Louise Lawson enter into dialogue to bring these two fields of practice and their associated methodologies and knowledges together. This dialogue presents opportunities for exchange between disciplinary and specialized knowledges. In what follows, therefore, we pose each other questions, while anchoring the discussion in case studies from Tate. Together we give a brief overview of the historical context for the work being carried out in the field of dance-visual arts exchange, differentiating that specific history and disciplinary practices from the broader performance field. Subsequently, we focus on the specific challenges that dance presents to the institution regarding conservation, care, ethics,

authority, resistance and diversity. The dialogic approach taken aims to reflect the collective nature of choreography and is a methodology we have committed to using throughout the life of the research project. This approach also reflects the authors' professional experience working with performance, dance and choreographic artists and artworks in the context of their institutions, with a focus on Tate and its collection.

As a project, Precarious Movements firstly defines its field of study historically and theoretically. Dance has played a major role in the development of some of the major aesthetic shifts since the mid-twentieth century including Minimalism, Neo-Dada, Conceptual Art and the emergence of performance art, non-object-based or dematerialized art, post-conceptual, post-disciplinary and participatory art. This history is being recuperated by historians and theorists such as Meredith Morse and Susan Rosenberg, and in their work we begin to see how a particular type of contemporary dance has formed part of the contemporary arts in their most progressive manifestations. We see dance-based works today that "belong" to the gallery in the way that Trisha Brown's *Walking on the Wall* (1971) does— a work that premiered at the Whitney Museum of American Art as part of *Another Fearless Dance Concert*—one of the first exhibitions to present dance *as* the art in the gallery (not alongside, in public programs).[1] David Velasco describes Sarah Michelson's *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012) as "the first [of her works] to be sited in a museum gallery, to be not just proximate to the corridors of visual art but *of* them."[2]

Erin Brannigan: Choreographic works are only recently being collected at other institutions too, such as the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the National Gallery of Denmark, shifting such works from public programs events to collections and acquisitions. An early example was The Museum of Modern Art's 2015 acquisition of Simone Forti's Dance Constructions (1960–1961).[3] The pioneering work of mid-century dance artists such as Forti, Brown and their peers Deborah Hay and Meredith Monk laid the groundwork for a new wave of innovators at the turn of the twenty-first century, who are both introducing instability to the institution and maintaining some ground beyond its reach. French dance theorist Laurence Louppe's summary of Trisha Brown's explorations of "dizzingly unmapped zones" across and between disciplines seems true of many of the dance artists working in this avant-garde, north-American mid-century scene. Louppe sees in Brown's work an exemplar of "the rootless freedom of contemporary art," embracing as it does the real risk of invention that tests discipline-based grammar, opening onto the current post-disciplinary condition of contemporary art in the twenty-first century where work often defies categorization.[4] Louppe finds a metaphor for this spirit in Brown's signature play with gravity: "the fall is there, ever impending. And the artist offers us a vision only on the brink of this unstable threshold."[5] Instability, precarity and risk are terms familiar to contemporary dance artists, and their work at the interface with the visual arts has been defined by these terms.

There are currently three different modes for contemporary dance in a given institution: an event program work, a licensed performance work and a

collection work—one which has been acquired into the permanent collection. Tate Modern's first performance commission was a dance work by DV8 Physical Theatre, called *Living Costs* (2003), as part of an event program. This historical example was commissioned for the Tate & Egg Live Series and took over the whole building for two ticketed shows per night, a feat that has never been repeated.[6] But Louise, what kind of dance works are being presented at and collected by Tate currently?

Louise Lawson: Dance has been part of the events program at Tate ever since *Living Costs*, but it's some 15 years later that we saw the first choreographic artworks start to enter Tate's permanent collection.[7] Let us start with Trisha Brown's *Set and Reset* (1983). This work was shown at The Tanks, Tate Modern, in January 2017 and was subsequently proposed for acquisition into the Tate collection in 2018. The acquisition encompasses an installation of the stage-set, costumes, lighting and music for Trisha Brown's dance production *Set and Reset* (1983), and consists of the sculpture, costumes and duplicate costumes created by Robert Rauschenberg for the visual design. It also entails lighting design by Beverly Emmons with Rauschenberg, music by Laurie Anderson and archival footage of the performance and rehearsals.[8] As part of the display of the work there is the opportunity to stage the choreography element of the work via a Professional License from the Trisha Brown Dance Company (further abbreviated to TBDC). This means Tate can request a license to show the choreographic aspect of the work but has not acquired this element. This remains with the TBDC who facilitates the presentation of this aspect of the work each time it is performed.

In 2019 Tate acquired its first choreographic artwork, Lee Mingwei's *Our Labyrinth* (2015–present). This work is a participatory performance project in which solo dancers, each dressed in a floor-length sarong and wearing an ankle bell, take it in turns to sweep a mound of rice in patterns on the floor in a designated gallery space. Each day a ritual is enacted in which a paper "wall" that surrounds the mound of rice is carefully removed and placed in a dedicated area for safekeeping. The dancers operate on a rota of shifts, bowing to each other before passing on the broom. The performance concludes each day with the tidying of the rice into a mound once more, and the replacement of the paper wall. The rice can be placed directly on the floor of the space or on a large dance mat in a shape that might be likened to a pool of ink.[9] This process involves dancers experienced in performing the work, described by Lee as "seed dancers," working with dancers selected via an audition process to transmit and share knowledge of the dance.[10] This process creates new seed dancers who can perform the work in the future. Such continuity of knowledge requires a shift in current conservation practice to develop new ways of supporting such artworks as they are not bound to materiality, but are either linked to the need to maintain the cycle of teaching new performers, or linked to an artist and their role within the overall artwork materialization.

Brannigan: Described above are three different ways dance enters the museum: an event program work (DV8), a licensed performance work (Brown)

and the collection work by Lee, the last of which might be an example of contemporary dance that is part of the broader field of the contemporary arts. We have collectively attempted a definition: We understand our subject to be the area of contemporary choreography that is engaged in discussions and conditions that correspond to those in the scope of visual art. The field has also been defined as part of my own work as "distinct from contemporary dance presented on the stage that has its lineage in theater and ballet, being rather *dance as a contemporary art media*. Such work has been exposed as both a crucial catalyst for innovation within broader aesthetic developments, and a distinct permutation of art categories such as the post-conceptual."[11] Louise, is this how you would understand the choreographic work that you encounter in your activity as conservator at Tate?

Lawson: With choreographic or dance works entering Tate's collection the conservation of this medium is in its infancy. Defining dance as a contemporary art medium certainly resonates in terms of care. For me, one of the biggest risks for any new form of artistic practice entering an institution is that it is seen as lying outside our standard systems and procedures. For this reason, even if the needs and vulnerabilities ultimately translate into different processes and practice, these new forms of artistic practice are becoming "objects" of conservation and we need to develop practices for caring for them.[12] Such has been the work in Conservation at Tate, which has been reflecting and revising its processes and practices associated with the care of performance artworks. This work has been informed by preceding projects at Tate which have influenced and shaped current conservation practice, starting with Collecting the Performative (2012–2014). This was the first project at Tate to look at emerging models for the documentation and conservation of performance and performance-based artworks. The project explored "how traditional approaches to conservation and collection management of collections—based on the assumption that a museum object is materially bound and fixed—needs to change."[13] The output from the project was a document titled "The Live List: What to Consider When Collecting Live Artworks." The Live List is a list of considerations and prompts that can be used for anyone considering collecting a live artwork. The "Live List" was used as the starting point for the project Documentation and Conservation of Performance (2016–2021) that followed. This five-year project was initiated in response to the increasing complexities of performance artworks entering the Tate collection. Work was undertaken to re-assess existing conservation strategies and to reflect on the practices of care. This project developed a strategy and framework for approaching performance artworks "with the intention of documenting and conserving all aspects of [a performance's] manifestations,"[14] creating key tools that aimed to support the documentation of a performance artwork at different moments within its lifecycle in the museum and to build a diverse documentation eco-system which can accommodate different moments such as previous manifestations, acquisition, display and activation and storage.

The work was expanded further by the project Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum (2018–2021).[15] This project focused on six case studies based on works in Tate's collection including works that unfolded over time and existed in multiple forms. Building on the existing approach to the conservation of performance this explored transmission and the role of documentation within this process. And now, the project Precarious Movements is exploring what the conservation of choreography and dance might mean for conservation and the conservator. As many institutions are in the very first moments of collecting dance, this project provides a timely opportunity to explore the questions dance and choreographic artworks present. Erin, what new questions do you think such works are starting to ask of us?

Brannigan: Lee's *Our Labyrinth* illustrates how choreographic work asks new questions when it enters the gallery context about the status of the artwork (embodied, transmitted), the nature of artistic labor (devising action, process as performance) and the gallery conditions (the floor not the wall, sharing performance space). These diverge from issues related to performance due to a common lack of residue (such as ongoing installations, props, videos, written scores), dependence upon corporeal (co-)presence, the high degree of virtuosic body work involved which is specialized and labor intensive, and specific requirements of the space-time that ensue (sprung floors, rotating casts, a heightened awareness of performer safety). For these reasons, they challenge institutions on the very grounds of conservation, care, ethics, authority, resistance and diversity. Louise, do you agree that such works resist collecting structures in these ways?

Lawson: Choreographic artworks have an intertwined relationship with the artist/choreographer, i.e. the creator and (often) performer. This can be seen with performance works in Tate's collection. The first performance works collected were primarily instruction-based, for example Roman Ondak's *Good Feelings in Good Times* (2003) which is a performance of an artificially created queue. Instructions are given to the curator who verbally relays them to the performers. The artist has "delegated" this work for others to perform and therefore reliance on the artist as the "authority" has been shifted to others. In her paper, "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity" (2012), Claire Bishop describes delegated performance as "the act of hiring non-professionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time and a particular place on behalf of the artist."[16] Having these types of works enter collections before non-delegated works perhaps made it easier in terms of conservation initially due to their instructional nature, allowing for institutional expertise to develop over time through experience with the challenges that performance artworks pose. This laid the groundwork within conservation to more readily respond to the more complex dance and performance works that are now entering Tate's collection.

For choreographic artworks, the reliance on the artist and thus potentially the span of their lifetime makes the collection and conservation processes more challenging. I do think there is also a question about artists wanting to keep

their "collection of works or practice" together. With Trisha Brown, licensing her work rather than facilitating collecting it allows her entire repertoire to stay together as a body of practice within the Trisha Brown Dance Company so this knowledge and understanding is sustained. To access it means working with a network that exists outside of the institution.

For works that are entering collections there are currently two models emerging. The first involves creating a network of authorized dancers teaching new generations of dancers that actively need support from the institution. Like Lee's "seed dancers," Forti's Dance Constructions (1960–1961) at MoMA use a model of designated "qualified teachers" who are enlisted to teach new performers.[17] Maria Hassabi's *STAGING* (2017), which is in the collection of The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, also requires "licensed teachers."[18] To support transmission in this way is an ongoing collective responsibility for any institution that engages with the work—i.e., if it were lent to another museum the same protocols would apply, and thus support the transmission and persistence of the work through this model.

The second model relates to what is being acquired, as exemplified by Hassabi's three distinct versions of a single work: *STAGING: solo* (2017), *STAGING: solo—archival* (2018) and *STAGING: 5min* (2018).[19] These are respectively the performed choreographic work, a video version and an installation/archive version. The artist describes *STAGING: Solo* as "solo figures installed in multiple interstitial spaces of a building [who] perform a choreographic script composed of long pauses and precise decelerated movements."[20] *STAGING: solo—archival* offers "an excerpt of the performance (giving a sense of speed, spatial parameters, interplay between dancers) and the context."[21] *STAGING: 5mins* is a "sculptural" entity and consists of three elements: "the taped Pink Line and Spike Mark, a stack of sheets of paper with an excerpt from the written script for *STAGING: solo*, with an invitation for the viewer to stand in the dancers space, and while reading the text, begin dancing the piece."[22] For the artist, the critical version remains that of the live dance, however the provision of three distinct versions of one work is an interesting one.[23] A number of artists are considering various versions at the point of acquisition in addition to the live version of the artwork. But is it the artist's intent for the work to have multiple versions, or are they concerned that the dance will not be sustained over time? Is it an opportunity for creation? Or might such versioning lead to the death of the danced version?

It seems to me that collecting institutions will potentially need to accept that the work may not persist. Reflecting on the acquisition of Hassabi's *STAGING* in his article in the Walker Art Gallery Magazine, Pavel Pys raises issues of "permanency" and the potential of "renewal" but also the "death" of a work within a collection. Pys describes that from the outset the artist "insisted that any acquisition must protect the live work as a form of embodied knowledge, meaning it could only be taught via 'body-to-body transmission,' passed on from the artist to one of her performers."[24] This latter requirement reflects the same model employed by Lee and Forti, as described earlier.

Brannigan: The impossibility of conservation—its limits or points of failure—is something that should be acceptable to the institution, but I'm not sure it is. Much of the current discourse on this topic assumes there are answers to be found, and there is clearly something very productive and also enlightening in pursuing this end goal. But perhaps we should return to this alternative story later.

These new models—transmission as conservation on the one hand and multiplication/diversification as conservation on the other—are addressing a certain perceived or real vulnerability for such works in the museum context, a condition that is quite distinct from instruction-based work such as Ondak's which circulates via curators and at arm's length from the "author." Such models respond to problems that have as much to do with creative cultures and economies as the ontological nature of the works themselves. Focusing here on the former to start, we have chosen the word "precarious" to frame the research project.

"Precarious movements" is a phrase used by choreographer Boris Charmatz in his "Manifesto for a National Choreographic Centre"—a *Musée de la danse*.[25] To him, precarity affords opportunities for both dance and the museum in the encounter between the two: "We are at a time in history where a museum can modify BOTH preconceived ideas about museums AND one's ideas about dance."[26] Radical redefinitions of what had been stable terms are bound to involve risk, and risk assumes potential failure. Yet Charmatz's project has been incredibly successful, involving major institutions such as Tate Modern, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes et de Bretagne and various iterations of works such as *50 ans de danse* (2009) and *Dancers for the Twentieth Century* (2013–2017).[27] At its heart, the project was meant as a form of institutional critique—both of dance and visual arts—however, both were ready for Charmatz. His *Musée de la danse*, a proposition of his dramaturg colleague Angèle Le Grand, is a takeover and its success may imply that the project played into the hands/needs of the museum to reinvent itself. This is clear when he states, "we are at a time in history where a museum can be alive and inhabited as much as a theater … where a museum in no way excludes precarious movements, nor nomadic, ephemeral, instantaneous ones."[28] Here he echoes the ambitions of the museum to move towards participation, inclusion and community engagement.

Precarity itself has many definitions. Hal Foster, following artist Thomas Hirschhorn and theorist Judith Butler, argues that precarity is a social construct describing the uncertainty and instability of some due to a power imbalance favoring others.[29] For Foster, the Greenbergian/modernist ideal that art be "the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point"—that is, expressing a stable, privileged position—is countered in the contemporary situation by a condition of precarity that has become a more relevant state of the art.[30] Such work manifests precarity by "letting […] formlessness be, as it were, so that it might evoke, as directly as possible, both the 'confusion' of ruling elites and the 'violence' of global capital." And according to Foster, the work that achieves this is often performance work.[31]

These theorists are giving an account of the slowly emerging project of decentralization in the arts over the past decades, and this project clearly has positive outcomes in its sights. Hirschhorn, one of the artists Foster discusses, places precarity at the center of his practice and distinguishes between the ephemeral as coming from nature, and precarity as the result of human actions and decisions.[32] Precarity is willful and is a condition that can be chosen, affirmative and resistant: "what's wonderful, important, the grace, the treasure, of the precarious: the precious value, the importance of the instant, the importance of the moment, the awakened presence of someone who dares to confront the precarious and its fragile, cruel, wild but free force. For, what is precarious is free."

The type of creative work that is at the heart of our project defines precarity as a practice of resistance through its very operations. As mentioned, dance has practical attributes that bump up against the traditions of visual art: embodied, ephemeral, processual, space-hungry, returning our gaze. Described elsewhere as "unassertive" (Brannigan), generative of "unregulated" knowledges and processes (Dempster), having a special relationship with "failure" (Burrows), with "weakness" and "unworking" as ontological conditions of dance (Solomon, Cvejić), contemporary dance has, historically, influenced new lineages of contemporary art practice that have embraced such conditions since the intermedial exchanges of the mid-twentieth century.[33]

Thinking about this from a conservation perspective, how does the condition of precarity manifest in the choreographic works you are dealing with?

Lawson: Conservation needs to protect and sustain our relationship with uncertainty, the unknown outcome, and to work to embrace this. Choreographic artworks involve a set of movements and behavioral patterns that embody a form of social memory, as performers shape and create the work, with their body playing a significant and crucial role. Choreographic artworks are precarious; due to the transmission of the work from body to body and because transmission processes have the potential for loss, modification and change, they primarily rely on a human-to-human chain of knowledge. There is a fragility in this network, with the human-to-human chain being more precarious than artworks that for example, can be "delegated" by the artist. As institutions, we must shift to support this human chain and living legacy exemplified in Lee's "seed dancers." These processes of transmission pose questions as to the models, approaches and environments that the institution needs to either create or support.

Brannigan: There is a huge shift in the nature of authorship here that sits alongside the change in our understanding of "the work of art" in its ontological state. The author cannot be distanced from the work of art in the same way that a score-based, textual performance work by George Brecht can operate independently of Brecht and can generate many responses that circulate well beyond his original creative gesture of writing a score for action. A work like his *Motor Vehicle Sundown Event* (1960) provides clear instructions involving manipulating the lights, radio, doors, windshield wipers and engine of a parked

car in a composition with other cars and their drivers. This work can continue to be performed by anyone, anytime, with any vehicles, with little more needed than the score-text. In comparison, the body of the choreographer-artist in many works engaging with the gallery context since Forti and Brown is inseparable from the work of art they produce, being the originary material from which it is made. This is the case with contemporary artists such as Maria Hassabi, Xavier Le Roy, Ralph Lemon and Adam Linder (and is distinct from repertoire models in theater based dance.) The subsequent dependence on human-to-human transmission is tied directly to the precarity of dance (to which I will return). You refer to embodied knowledge, collective memory and body-to-body transmission, which are all recognizable as choreographic processes and methods, as part of a new apparatus of conservation that is building around the acquisition of dance works. Can you talk a bit more about the way conservation tools and languages have had to adapt in dealing with such work?

Lawson: To use a material-oriented conservation term: "inherent vice" means the tendency of an object or material to deteriorate due to its "internal characteristics," rather than outside forces or damage.[34] In material practice, this means that the work will endure change or perhaps loss, often a self-catalytic process that results in its own destruction and/or transformation into something different, if it ultimately can exist at all in the long term. In a material process, the conservator must decide if or when to intervene, based on what the artist deems acceptable change or loss. With artworks that shift away from a material process, such as choreographic artworks, one could, as a starting point, consider if these artworks have any inherent vices, which the conservator needs to support and work towards creating conditions that would allow them to thrive. For example, is precarity one such vice, or is it in fact a condition that needs to be conserved? Accepting in the same way that material-based works will endure change, but rather than change and loss not being accepted it is instead something critical to what these artworks are and do. Working to understand how mutable each artist might consider their work to be and how might this change over time. If these works do become something else perhaps this is why some artists are already thinking of multiple versions of a work. As you described earlier Erin, precarity can be a condition that is chosen—or perhaps in this context, whether chosen or not, it needs to be accepted, understood and affirmed by the institution.

Brannigan: On the other hand, could we think about the very complex, networked and embodied nature of the processes and methods above as *more* dependable than the vagaries of authored works disassociated from their authors? The nature of choreographic work has led us to put artists and creative practice firmly at the center of our inquiry in Precarious Movements through planning multiple commissions and workshops across the life of the research project, engaging artist knowledge and experience as primary research and supporting dancers and choreographers as important end-users. Our outcomes reflect this philosophy too: best-practice guidelines and toolkits to support both the choreographer and the museum. The acknowledgement in our

method of a central role for the artists in all facets of the art work's life-cycle would seem to ensure a very direct relationship between artists and their work that might be lost in the conservation of other media. Could this be true?

Lawson: Let's consider two partner organizations in the project Precarious Movements (2021–24): Tate and Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW). In both these institutions performance works are cared for by time-based media conservators, who are experienced in managing works that rely on the artist and their larger body of work or practice. The core challenges of time-based media conservation include defining what the work is, how the work was conceived of by the artist (and how this might change over time), technological obsolescence and managing change. We are also witnessing the role that social networks and communities play in relation to the realization of performance artworks, albeit these networks and communities are not limited to performance artworks. These networks and communities exist outside of the museum institution but are critical in the delivery of performance artworks, such as the Metropolitan Police Force and their mounted horse division in the performance of Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #5* [35] or musical instrument makers that created the musical instruments used and played in Tarek Atoui's *The Reverse Collection* (2016).[36] The institution doesn't "hold" all that is needed to activate an artwork and those skills, knowledges sit elsewhere and this needs to be brought together to materialize the performance. The challenge for me is that choreographic works amplify some of these challenges and potentially introduce new ones, such as knowledge, actions being contained within the human body and the ongoing relationship with the artists and those wider networks.

Brannigan: So perhaps an ethics of care for choreographic works in the gallery might involve an ethical community practice that places the institution into a horizontal relationship with what is beyond it; a kind of *diversification*. Indeed, the collective nature of this article—that is, the fact that it emerged from the research collaboration between us—reflects the collective nature of choreography, and we are committed to collectivity as a methodology throughout the life of the research project. Our Precarious Movements research team and project associates include curators, conservators, theorists, publishers and archivists, but importantly, the project also includes artists. Our lead artist, Shelley Lasica, will be financially compensated on a part-time wage for the life of the project, a first from Government funded academic grants in Australia.

How do you see the role of the artists at Tate, Louise?

Lawson: The role of artist is central. Within the institutional life of an artwork, this isn't a single moment, but multiple and various moments across an artwork's life that the artist needs to be involved in. The artist is involved at the moment of acquisition, but also across the lifetime of the artwork; they are at the point of activation or display, but they also co-determine the ongoing preservation of the work and how can the work evolve over time.

Thinking firstly about the artist in the moment of acquisition and working towards an activation, for Lee's *Our Labyrinth*, we started conversations in

2019 with the artist and the curator allocated to this acquisition, in order to understand the work and its requirements. It was very much a collaborative process, and with my conservation colleagues Ana Ribeiro and Hélia Marçal, we worked collectively to develop our understanding of this work.[37] These initial conversations with the artist started to paint a picture of the other "moments" that would need to engage the artist. We identified the auditions, rehearsals as well as any activation in the gallery as such moments. We built into this process moments of engagement and reflection with the artist, experienced "seed" dancers and the new generation of dancers. We had a series of internal conservation-led workshops considering what we may need to record, and possible modes for doing this.

The work's activation was delayed (at the time of writing) due to Covid-19. But nonetheless, observing the audition process was enlightening, particularly how the written description of the work is translated into movement. The artist's written description requires the work to be performed "in a breathy, flowing, continuous slow movement."[38] Despite the presence of the instruction, the experience of the work materializing in front of our eyes was tantalizing. It revealed knowledge that exceeds the instruction. Observing this process played a critical role in understanding what the artist was looking for with the intention of the piece. It was absolutely illuminating to see that in a very visual way, and think about how the artist, one of his experienced dancers, or the curator responded to that. It became really clear what the artist was looking for in terms of the intention of these dancers. Recordings of different moments in the audition will be helpful for conservation purposes. Our conversations around long-term preservation are in progress, but hinge on the seed dancer and the transmission of knowledge.

Another example where the artist presence and involvement is critical, when discussing long-term preservation, is the most recent interview conducted by Tate Research and Conservation in 2019 with the artist Tania Bruguera, about her work *Tatlin's Whisper #5*. In this 2019 interview, the artist speaks to the conditions for the work. She also reexplored the characteristics of the work that are important and how the work could evolve, emphasizing that the work was very specific to the horses, saying that "having a horse live in the museum relates to the history of representation of power in our history."[39] Having multiple moments to speak with the artist in this instance revealed more in terms of what we need to consider or perhaps re-evaluate for the long-term preservation and care of this work. Erin, where do you see the artist's role regarding choreographic work entering the gallery? Do you think institutions need to be doing more to support artists?

Brannigan: Yes, I do. There's no doubt that this kind of work is unprecedented when it comes to the material conditions of the work of art, issues of labor and authorship, and the status and transmission of artist knowledge. However, I think the type of conservation work we are talking about—expansive, networked, long-term, careful—has a good chance of serving the choreographic artists who are creating work that is being presented, collected and

conserved by art museums and galleries. But this must always include the possibility that the museum or gallery is not going to be able to "hold" the work, as we have noted, and that artists may not want to see their work through this process.

New conservation models based on *transmission* and *diversification* outlined earlier seem appropriate in this expanded model, involving a network of participants on the one hand or variations of the work in multiple formats on the other. And they also suit the creative ecologies of the art form; dance has traditionally been a more democratic, collective economy amongst the contemporary arts since the mid-century revolutions, dismantling the hierarchies of power that were a remainder from the dominance of classical-ballet traditions and moving away from a central authority. The art form excels at collective processes, and this is summed up in a favorite quotation of mine by American choreographer Jennifer Lacey, who says that "dance is about people spending time together, thinking by behaving, and modify[ing] their thoughts by modifying their behavior: it is potentially a very powerful work."[40] Changing social economies within museum practices might mean opening onto new modes of exchange that are durational, co-present, long-lasting and mutable. There are obviously pros and cons when it come to a new dependence on expert networks beyond the institution to best care for the choreographic works in an exhibition, archive or collection. And I'd love to spend more time thinking through such a model against the fantastically dramatic language that conservation uses to describe the unstable elements of a work of art—loss, deterioration and "inherent vice." For our next conversation?

Lawson: Absolutely Erin, I am thinking how we could use our language to disrupt our thinking—is loss a negative outcome?—are unstable elements problematic?—and to consider further the possibilities or impossibilities choreographic works present for conservation. Till next time.

Notes

1 Susan Rosenberg, *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017): 66–67.
2 David Velasco, "I'll Be Your Mirror," *Artforum* 52, no. 5 (2014): 176.
3 Megan Metcalf, "In the New Body: Simone Forti's Dance Constructions (1960–61) and their Acquisition by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)" (PhD diss., University of California, 2018).
4 Laurence Louppe, "Chaos Made Tangible," in *Trisha Brown: Danse, précis de liberté*, ed. Corinne Diserens (Marseille: Musées de Marseille and Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1998), 123.
5 Louppe, "Chaos Made Tangible," 123.
6 Erin Brannigan's correspondence with Lloyd Newsom, November 12, 2021.
7 See Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA and Whitney," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2014): 67.
8 Catherine Wood and Fiontan Moran, Tate's internal acquisition document, 2018.
9 Katy Wan, Tate's internal acquisition document, 2018.
10 Notes from the internal meeting with Lee Mingwei, Tamsin Hong, Louise Lawson, Hélia Marçal and Ana Ribeiro, Tate's internal document, October 2019.

11 Erin Brannigan, *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s– 1970s* (London: Routledge, 2022).

12 Challenges presented by new forms of artist practice have been articulated in Lawson et al., "The Living Process of Conserving Performance: Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Performance-based Artworks at Tate," paper presented at New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art, Maastricht University, March 25, 2019.

13 Collecting the Performative was a Tate led project from 2021–2014, see https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/collecting-performative.

14 Louise Lawson, Acatia Finbow and Hélia Marçal, "Developing a Strategy for the Conservation of Performance-Based Artworks at Tate," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 42, no. 2 (2019): 114–134.

15 For a description of all these projects see Lawson et al., "Developing a Strategy;" and Hélia Marçal, "Contemporary Art Conservation," Reshaping the Collectible.

16 Claire Bishop, "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity," *October* 140 (2012): 91.

17 Metcalf, "In the New Body", 147.

18 Pavel Pys, "Momentary Arrest: Collecting Interdisciplinary Artworks," *Walker Art Gallery Magazine*, May 21, 2020, accessed September 28, 2021, https://walkerart.org/magazine/momentary-arrest-collecting-interdisciplinary-artworks.

19 Pys, "Momentary Arrest."

20 See Maria Hassabi's website, accessed September 28, 2021, mariahassabi.com.

21 Pys, "Momentary Arrest."

22 Pys, "Momentary Arrest."

23 Pys, "Momentary Arrest."

24 Pys, "Momentary Arrest."

25 Boris Charmatz, "Manifesto for a National Choreographic Centre," *Dance Research Journal* special issue, *Dance in the Museum* 46, no. 3 (2014): 47.

26 Charmatz, "Manifesto for a National Choreographic Centre," 47.

27 In this work, Charmatz commissions dancer-choreographers to perform solos from the history of contemporary dance in public spaces such as museums, libraries and other civic buildings. *20 Dancers for the Twentieth Century* (2013–2017) has been performed at MoMA (October 18, 19 and 20, 2013), Tate Modern (May 15 and 16, 2015) and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (December 17, 2016), among other museums, libraries and civic buildings.

28 Charmatz, "Manifesto for a National Choreographic Centre," 47.

29 Hal Foster, "Precarious," *Artforum* 48, no. 4 (2009), accessed October 1, 2021, https://www.artforum.com/print/200910/hal-foster-24264. He is referencing Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 130, 134.

30 Butler, "Precarious Life," 130, 134.

31 Butler, "Precarious Life," 130, 134.

32 Hirschhorn et al., *Critical Laboratory*, 307.

33 Erin Brannigan, "Moving Across Disciplines: Dance in the Twenty-First Century," *Platform Papers: Quarterly Essays on the Performing Arts*, no. 25 (October 2010): 1– 16; Elizabeth Dempster, "Undisciplined Subjects, Unregulated Practices: Dancing in the Academy," in *Proceedings of the Conference Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid*, ed. Kim Vincs (Ausdance National, 2004), accessed April 20, 2013, http://ausdance.org.au/articles/details/undisciplined-subjects-unregulated-practices; Jonathan Burrows, *A Choreographer's Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2010); Noémie Solomon, "Unworking the Dance Subject" (PhD diss., New York University, 2012); and Bojana Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Dance and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

34 See "Inherent Vice," American Institute of Conservation WIKI, accessed September 29, 2021, https://www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/Inherent_vice.

35 This is a performance that involves two mounted policemen in uniform (one on a white horse and one on a black horse) which are brought into the exhibition space. They patrol the space, guiding and controlling the public by using a minimum of six crowd control techniques. See https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bruguera-ta tlins-whisper-5-t12989.

36 For more information about this artwork, see https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/a toui-the-reverse-collection-t15023.

37 Ana Ribeiro is a time-based media conservator at Tate. Hélia Marçal was the Fellow in Contemporary Art Conservation and Research of the Andrew W. Mellon funded research project, Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum, at Tate (2018–2020).

38 Lee Mingwei, "Guidelines for Dancers," Tate's internal document, 2019.

39 Tania Bruguera, interview by Pip Laurenson, Louise Lawson, Sarah Haylett and Lia Kramer, Tate's internal document, 2019.

40 Jennifer Lacey, "Jennifer Lacey in Conversation with Mathieu Copeland Gare de l'Est, Paris, 16 October 2010," in *Choreographing Exhibitions*, ed. Mathieu Copeland and Julie Pellegrin (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2013), 127.

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15 Potential afterlives

Cauleen Smith on the relation of film to performance—A conversation with Hanna B. Hölling and Jules Pelta Feldman

Cauleen Smith is a filmmaker and multimedia artist who produces street performances, flash mobs, installations, drawings and art objects. Smith holds a BA degree in Cinema from San Francisco State University and an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles and is a professor in the School of Art and Architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles. In the conversation below, Smith discusses films such as the highly acclaimed *Drylongso* (1998), *Sojourner* (2019) and *Space is the Place (A March for Sun Ra)* (2011), the last of which documents the *Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band*, a "flash mob" Smith organized in Chicago, for which a high school marching band played the music of Sun Ra. She also speaks about *Black Love Procession*, a collective performance—part celebratory parade, part political protest—that she organized in Chicago in 2015. Throughout the conversation, Smith reflects on the possible afterlives of her works, the relation between film and performance, and the importance of contingency in her process. As Smith explains, revisiting the past has the potential to resurrect old traumas but also to improve the future.

Hanna Hölling: I am interested in knowing whether the preservation of your work has influenced your artistic practice, both in its early stage and as it has developed over time?

Cauleen Smith: More so now. In the process of developing a practice, I think practice is the most important part. I'm not sure if the artist themself is the best person to preserve their work. I used to make drawings and storyboards all the time, and then just throw them away. Finally, my gallery saw them and said, "Just don't throw anything away, give it to us." They ended up selling some of my drawings. It never occurred to me that what for me was just the way to think through a project could be understood as something of value for anybody else. These are things I've learned over the years, but I still think more about what I'm going to make than how to take care of what I have made. Because of my upbringing, my understanding both of my work and of art is that they take place in public places. I never really thought of art as something that you would own and collect just for yourself. Because I only experienced it in museums. When I'm making a work, that's the way I think. I'm grateful to institutions and museums if they collect my work because that means that it's cared for. If I get it back, there's a good chance that I'm going to cannibalize aspects of it. I

have a bunch of hard drives with film and raw footage, and I don't know if they'll ever turn on again. I haven't checked. If it's gone, it's gone.

The Academy of Motion Picture Sciences approached me maybe 14 years ago and said, "Hey, we just want all of your negatives—anything you have, can we have it?" That was just a profound gift. I'd been humping around boxes of negatives and A-B rolls. I understood their value because of my own relationship to finding old films. The filmmakers who made them may not have been well received and may not have valued their own work. But to me, it means everything. So, I understood that I should just keep this stuff, that there might be a filmmaker in the future who needs it. But I didn't know how to care for it, and so it means a lot to me when institutions come and rescue this stuff because I'm not one of those artists who's going to have an amazing archive when I die. It's going to have to be up to other people. I'm just thinking about the things I want to make.

Jules Pelta Feldman: How do you see the role of performance in your work generally? I don't necessarily just mean human performance, but also the performance of animals or objects or places.

CS: In film school you're trained to pay a lot of attention to performance and acting and the construction of an illusion. And I found that fascinating in terms of the craft of what actors do. But I didn't find it interesting in terms of a director, or of what I wanted to do. Oftentimes, even in *Drylongso* (1998), which is a traditional narrative film, I would allow things to happen because they were interesting to me, like casting a woman who does community theater.[1] She has this big theatrical style. And instead of trying to get her to hone it down, I would allow her to do that and to improvise, and that would be better than anything I had written. And even though it wasn't in balance with these other classically trained styles of film acting, I thought it had a kind of verisimilitude to the community of people using performance to navigate their way through life. I thought it was truthful, even though it was bombastic.

As I moved into more conceptual films, I discovered that I thrive when I can create conditions where there's just the possibility for everyone to improvise or for whatever is happening in that place to happen. Just producing the conditions that allow people or even the place to do what it does. *Drylongso* has a scene with an ice cream truck, which just happened to be rolling down the street while we were shooting dialogue. All the kids who were hanging out on our set wanted ice cream. So we just set up the camera and shot the ice cream truck. I didn't even know how to use it, but I thought, we're done until all these kids get ice cream, and we can get them settled down again, so we might as well just film this. And that became a crucial little hinge or a connective tissue in the film that I had not written or storyboarded or predicted.

I've taken those lessons into projects like the *Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band* (2010–12).[2] All I could do is set up the conditions for this event, which I called a flash mob, to happen. I didn't implement any real choreography, though the band director did. I explored getting permission to have us descend on the site, but no one would speak with me.[3] So after trying, I gave up and I

thought, "Well, it is kind of a public square, so we'll just occupy this public space." I explained to the marching band that I don't have a permit, so if they tell us to stop, we have to stop. I wanted to make the conditions that we were working under transparent and explicit.

The band director took it on as an educational opportunity, so I had to talk to the band about who Sun Ra was, and then I got to witness them rehearsing the music, which was an amazing experience. But there was also a lot that I wasn't involved in, in terms of how marching bands function and how they were going to arrive. They made decisions about their arrangement, how they would appear and what they would wear. I had an idea about the music, but I didn't know what it was going to sound like. All I could do is to set up conditions and then everybody had to show up and decide if they're going to perform.

It was pouring that day, so if you had been there, you would've been under that awning with all the other people or just in your car missing the whole thing, which happened. People showed up and then sat in their car waiting for the rain to end, thinking that we weren't going to do it if it was raining. But I didn't have a say. The marching band was ready to go. This is a Chicago marching band, so they function under all conditions—snow, blizzards. It never occurred to me that they would just keep performing while it's pouring down rain. They just started singing, I didn't have anything to do with that. That's the beauty of collaboration when you have wonderful collaborators like that marching band and the band director. The ethics that he was teaching to those young people as a band, as a community was about how to show up and how to do what they do. That's what that film reveals. More than anything, I think more than any idea I have, is that every time I watch it, I just get so emotional about those kids. There's one kid who is having doubts. He's playing a bass drum and he looks up at the weather and he's like, "What are we doing?" But everybody else just doubles down. It's like, "This is what we do." I wouldn't have even asked anybody to do that. I love creating these really unstable conditions. Sometimes you get a wonderful gift and sometimes it fails. That's the risk. It's 50/50. That's just the nature of the way that I set things up.

JPF: Is that part of what performance means to you, something that you can't control?

CS: Probably so, I haven't really thought about it in those terms. I did this procession in Chicago that we ended up calling the *Black Love Procession* (2015). It was an idea I had, but then I needed help, so I asked other artists that I was friends with if they were interested to take part in the procession. It was a kind of protest that I wanted to do. I had an idea about how to do the procession as a protest, but my friends had other ideas. They wanted to make a procession that celebrated love. But there was a lot of anarchy. It almost didn't happen because we showed up and people became afraid, "Oh my God, what are we doing?" We almost cancelled it, and then suddenly rallied. And then it was a really beautiful experience—an event that has minimal documentation, maybe seven photographs (Figure 15.1). And I wish the photographs were a little better, but there wouldn't have been a way to document the process.

Figure 15.1 Cauleen Smith, *Black Love Procession* (2015), image courtesy of the Artist and Morán Morán. Photo Credit: Kate Sierzputowski.

There was no plan. There was so little planning, the idea was just mainly to make something that you can carry down the street and show up, and we're going to follow this ice cream truck because ice cream trucks—again the ice cream truck!—they get to go very slow down the street. If you just follow one, then you're not breaking any laws. It's like an urban hack of how to have a parade without getting a permit. Just hire the ice cream truck and tell them where to go. Police don't bother ice cream trucks, so you can do what you want as long as you're behind them. It's what we did, and it worked. In fact, the police came to tell us that we were in the ice cream truck's way at one point.

That project exists in anecdotes amongst all of us, the eight or nine people who were at the core of planning it. Then there are seven or eight photographs that tell a story. Then there's ephemera; I still have some fliers that someone handed out. And the banners that I carried are in a museum now, so they're preserved, which is shocking because they were made as disposable objects. It's embarrassing.

HH: In *Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band*, you mentioned setting up conditions for a work to happen. Given that one approach to keeping a performance alive is to allow it to be reperformed, have you ever considered establishing conditions for the reperformance of this work? Since many of your performative works—*Black Love Procession* and the *Solar Flare Arkestra*—are highly improvisational and spontaneous, the idea of reperformance might be complicated. With this in mind, do you view reperformance as a necessary condition for the continuity of these works, and what role does your film play in relation to these performances?

CS: It depends on the piece. Something like the *Black Love Procession* could easily happen every year, annually, and it could be done by any artists who want to do it. It was an artist-produced procession, and I think it would have

been beautiful if we'd done it every year. It never occurred to us to institutio-nalize it in that way. But if someone in Chicago said, "Let's do that again," I'd say, "Absolutely, let's do that again," because it would be like a parade, dif-ferent every year, something like the *Solar Flare Arkestra*. I actually did that flash mob four times, and the only documentation that turned into a finished film is the one that took place in Chinatown Square (Figures 15.2 and 15.3). For

Figure 15.2 Cauleen Smith, *Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band* (2011), film still cour-tesy of the Artist and Morán Morán.

Figure 15.3 Cauleen Smith, *Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band* (2011), film still cour-tesy of the Artist and Morán Morán.

another one, I didn't like the documentation on film so much, so I turned it into a slide show as part of *Black Utopia LA (2010–2023)*. And so it appears in this work as 35 millimeter slides.[4] I did the flash mob with that same band two other times, and I just didn't like the photographs and video I got out of it. I couldn't use what the camera person I hired gave me.

I was invited to do the *Solar Flare Arkestra* again in Mexico, in Oaxaca. I thought about it and I tried to find a way to make it work. But I couldn't, because that piece was so site-specific and it was also responding to a particular time. And the culture of the city itself —I was interested in doing something that was like a protest, but that was also like a celebration for a particular group of people and a particular political climate and a particular place. That piece is so site specific to me and so temporally specific, I couldn't energize myself to do it again elsewhere. It didn't make sense.

There was also so a lot of research, conversations, meetings with people and trips to the library to learn the history of marching bands involved in leading up to making the *Solar Flare Arkestra* work. A lot of things happened then. When I was talking to composers about making the arrangements, I learned about the relationship between these Chicago high school marching bands and the southern, historically black colleges that they often get scholarships to. There's a whole ecosystem that I was trying to celebrate and amplify. It didn't make sense to redo it, and I'm not even sure I would do it now. But there's other kinds of processions that I would happily do again.

HH: In your film, *Space is the Place (A March for Sun Ra)* (2011), you capture the spontaneous performance of the *Solar Flare Arkestra* and preserve it for posterity. I am curious whether you view film as a deliberate method of preserving performance, and how a documentary film differs from a video documentation, which performance artists frequently commission?

CS: I was always thinking of the march for Sun Ra as a film. I was manufacturing this event so that I could make a film. The flash mob in Chicago was the first one that we did, and then it was just fun and it produced interesting reverberations in the surrounding area. So we just kept doing it. And those iterations of the march were honestly just for fun—as long as someone was willing to pay for the marching band, their buses and food, then I was like, "Yeah," and the marching band was like, "Yeah, let's do it." They loved doing it. I may have five photographs of their performance, but a lot of random people took photographs because the band was performing for them. This encouragement also facilitated the marching band doing what that marching band does so well, getting them some money because public schools have no money and giving them exposure, which they really loved having. The march made them visible to an art world that wouldn't even know they existed. But I had already made my film, which is what I had intended to make.

HH: What would be the ideal afterlife for the *Solar Flare Arkestra*? How would you envision this work existing in the future, when we are no longer around? Would its afterlife take the form of a film, an installation, or manifest in props and projections, as we have seen in your previous works?

CS: Really that moment only exists as the film, the film is the work. I wish I had another way of preserving or hanging on to the collaboration with that marching band, because it entailed so many aspects. It was, among others, the parents thinking I was really weird and not wanting their kids to talk to me at first; it was the band director. There's a lot that isn't in the film that I wish I had a way to preserve.

My work *Black Utopia* is the only work that I think of as a performance, and it has a record. It's not a film, and it can't be a film. It comes from all the research that I did about Chicago and Sun Ra, including the *Solar Flare Arkestra* piece. At the beginning, it was just a mass of photos in my iPhone from archives, his personal papers, and then the books he read. I would go and find that book and then find other books, and there are things I learned—like the Dogon and the Egyptian pyramids—that I thought, if Sun Ra were alive now, he would be interested in. I studied all of that because Sun Ra studied it, and I ended up with this mass archive of my own. I then turned this research into a slide show that I perform, and the soundtrack to the slideshow is the sound ephemera of Sun Ra and his business partner. The soundtrack entails everything from their answering machine tapes to rehearsals, conversations and lectures that I edited in and that were from the same area or were speaking to Sun Ra. As I was editing that sound ephemera, I was thinking of it as a soundtrack to a film without knowing what the images would be. And then I realized that I'm not allowed to reproduce this archival material—the University of Chicago, which holds the Sun Ra papers, has very strict rules, so I couldn't print these materials or use them in a film. But if I make a 35 millimeter slide of this and show it as a lecture, it's completely legal. So I shared all of this research via 35 millimeter slides. I drop the needle on the record and start putting slide carousels on. It's always a disaster because the slides jam. I have to time the presentation and remember what's coming. Every time I perform it in a different city, I add slides about Sun Ra related to that city. The last time I did it was in Rotterdam, and I was supposed to do it in San Francisco. And then COVID happened. But while the sonic archive is fixed, my visual archive grows as I do more research on Sun Ra and his practices.

To speak about a different way of dealing with these materials is my attempt to preserve or conserve. All of this knowledge that I accumulated in the process of making that 10-minute marching band movie is now in this other performance. I'm not a performer, so it's really depleting to do and it's very anxiety-producing. But now I have the slides and the record, and it can't be turned into a film because I don't have the rights to any of the images. So someone has to perform it.

HH: As a filmmaker, you approach your work differently from a performer which is evident in how you use filmic language to describe your work, e.g. you speak of props, rather than performance relics.

CS: You know, my painter friends ask me about this, because I would make an object with the intent of using it in a film and they'd say, "So is this a prop or is this an art object?" They wanted to know—how are they supposed to

engage it? Basically, they were suggesting that I had just made an art object, so what do I need to make the film for? I have frequently come to that conclusion myself, that I've made these objects and they're doing the job that the film was going to do. For instance I learned how to do ceramics so that I could use porcelain to look like crumpled sheets of paper. My idea was to have an actor write some stuff, dislike it, and then crumple up the paper and throw it away. A trick of photography would have the crumbled paper land and shatter into porcelain shards. I really liked my porcelain paper crumples—I still have them—but I never bothered making that film.

Then there was *In the Wake, a Procession* (April 11, 2017). That was also supposed to be a film, but cinematically, it was a disaster. I made these textile banners with the express purpose of filming people marching with them in a snowstorm in Chicago, like a dirge, like a requiem. But they had to go to the 2017 Whitney Biennial, and there was no snow during the winter when I worked on them.[5] As a result, I couldn't make the film that I wanted to make with these objects before they got hung up in the museum. Then, ironically, on the opening of that biennial, there was a blizzard in New York, and I said, "This is the weather that I needed to make the film." I asked, "Can I take them down and just shoot the film real quick and then we can hang them back up?" And miraculously, they didn't say no. It took them six weeks, but they said, "Yeah, we'll take these down for you and you can do the thing and then we'll hang them up," which is insanely generous. Most institutions would not do that. I just have a fealty to the Whitney Museum for the generosity that they extended to me. But by the time we did it, it was sunny and springtime in New York—probably better, honestly, for everybody involved. We marched around the High Line several times. But now I think I would make more banners in the same mode and not feel compelled to use them in a procession. Because I learned that the banners have a presence and mobility (within the mind of the spectator) of their own.

I'm not from New York, it's not a city I have any affinity with. I feel like I see New York in movies so much that I'm not interested in filming it myself. So that could have also been part of the problem with how I was directing the film and why the footage was terrible. But the sound from that performance was amazing, so I made a record. I made this little 10-inch EP, *Pigeons are Black Doves* (2017). To me, this is the best document because it was the most important aspect of the performance. It was a collaboration with a composer, Avery R. Young, who took the text off of the banners, and all these words became the lyrics to the song that he arranged vocally. He made a recording for me because he couldn't be in New York to teach people how to sing it. He made a recording where he and his collaborator, Tina M. Howell, sang all the parts and harmonies. One side of the record is Avery and Tina teaching you how to sing the song, which is hilarious because they're very funny. Avery's recording of the song is just devastating because he's amazing. And then the other side is the live procession. I had a teenage chorus and then four professional singers doing the procession. The sound person I hired was fantastic and the sound was really good, so we mixed that into this composition.

This became, to me, the perfect document of the piece. I'm happy with it. I wasn't happy with how any of the images looked. I do have a 30-second clip that shows the teenagers, the amazing vocalists, and us on the street and that's enough. You don't need to see us performing for three hours. Because I am working so unstably, this was my response to the material. What is good is that, before I even start with performances, I accept that they could fail. A performance must succeed, but whether I set up the conditions of filming well enough is an open question. So then I'm left with, well "What do I have here?" And in this case, the sound was really moving and incredible.

HH: Can a film serve as a visual script or instruction for a future reperformance or reenactment? If you establish conditions for a performance that you plan to film from the outset, the performance serves as a starting point for the film. However, can a film in turn serve as a starting point for a future performance and be interpreted as a visual script or a set of instructions?

CS: Yes, definitely. To me, that's what a screenplay is—it's something you're going to turn into a performance that you're then going to film. So much of what I make has to do with how I was trained as a filmmaker. I think of everything I write as a proposal for a film. And I think you could reverse engineer some of the films. I don't think of the work I create as performance in the visual arts sense. Even when I'm performing, I'm always thinking of my works as films, even when they don't turn into a film.

JPF: You've emphasized not just the fact of instability, but the meaning and significance of instability in the situations that you set up—your openness to the fact that you don't really know how things are going to go. With something like a reenactment or a reperformance, there's always the danger that something previously open and contingent becomes fixed. So I wonder whether you could imagine a recreation of the *Black Love Procession*, for example?

CS: No. It would just be like, "We're going to do another *Black Love Procession*." We should do it on Memorial Day. It's one of the first sunny, warm days in Chicago. People just set up barbecues on the sidewalk and are so excited. It was a perfect day to do a procession because people were out on the streets. To my mind, the only conditions of reenacting the *Black Love Procession* are the ice cream truck, and that you have to give things away. All of us did, except for me. One person gave away love poems. Another person gave away flowers. If you wanted an ice cream from the ice cream truck, we would buy it. We just paid the ice cream tab at the end of the day. Those would be the conditions: You need an ice cream truck, and anybody who wants ice cream can have it; you have to give some things away; you have to do it on a day when people are on the street. But to reenact it, to drag those banners out of the museum… First of all, I think I would make different banners now. The banners I had were quotations from a Gwendolyn Brooks poem, she's a Chicago writer, and she lived in the neighborhood where the procession took place. For me, Brooks was a window into understanding the community when I arrived there. So now maybe I would quote someone else, like Lorraine Hansberry or Chance the Rapper, who knows?

I think the oral history of that process would be interesting. One of the participants, Ayana Contreras, has a book out now that's about optimism in Chicago, *Energy Never Dies: Afro-Optimism and Creativity in Chicago* (2021), in which she talked about the procession. I feel like the oral histories of that event, even from people who received flowers or got ice cream, could be very interesting. It was like a clunky little parade. There wasn't really anything to see. What mattered was the encounter. That's also why *Pigeons are Black Doves* is the documentation of the other procession. I don't know if we need to keep everything.

This is a thorn in my side as a maker because I like working with materials that will not last forever, like plastics and fabrics. The Whitney conservators told me that I shouldn't use red felt on my banners because red felt fades. And I was like, "So what? Let it fade." If this thing lasts a hundred years and the red felt has faded, that's a win. Or replace the felt. They bought five of the banners, but they didn't buy any of the banners that had red felt. I thought that was completely idiotic.

Reenactment is something I've tinkered with. I did a reenactment of a very traumatic event, and what I learned from that was that by reenacting it, I was reenacting trauma. I thought, this is not a good strategy for art making because I'm not interested in traumatizing people. It's a film called *Remote Viewing* (2011), where I bury a house underground, and so we had to build the house and then destroy it.[6] And it was just as terrible as the initial event we were trying to reenact and understand. I stopped doing it until recently. The film *Sojourner* (2018), which is about Alice Coltrane and Rebecca Cox Jackson, crystallized around an image that a photographer named Bill Ray took in 1966 of some kids, all these young men, at the Watts Towers in Los Angeles.[7] When I saw that image, I thought it was just magical. But I also noticed that this photographer did not picture young women really at all. I thought it might make sense to reenact the picture with women, and that became sort of the anchor for the whole film. I could say that if I reenact something, it will be revisionist.

JPF: I wanted to ask about *Sojourner* because I know you've said, talking about that film, that "it is possible to build a better world."[8] In regard to *Remote Viewing,* you were just saying that reenactment can bring back the trauma of the past. But in *Sojourner,* it seems to me that you're performing events—and places, words and music—from the past as a way of building that better world, which also connects to the role of Afrofuturism in your work. So I'm wondering, do you think that performing the past might also help us change the future?

CS: Absolutely. That's what I think. Maybe it's not quite that linear, but for me, what I learned from the past are all these different modes and tactics and strategies for survival, liberation, justice. These things happened. Maybe they don't happen on the scale of the violences of our world, but they did happen. I'm very interested in using what can be learned of the past to insist on a different kind of future or to suggest it—and suggest it publicly, but insist upon it in my films.

I've been making films for about 30 years, and when I first started making particularly the Afrofuturist films, no one wanted to play them and no one

cared about them. I couldn't get them into any film festival. And now, this very emotional thing happened in 2019 at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam. In a retrospective, I was showing a bunch of early, short films, several of which had been rejected by this very festival. I mentioned that, and I said, "What I've learned is that sometimes you're making your work for a future audience, sometimes you're making work for people who don't exist yet." And I felt that about these films—that even though they weren't popular, and no one wanted to screen them at that time, I thought, I know that there's something in these because I'm making them based on what other people have taught me. I'm drawing on another path. The reward of that patience is that then in Rotterdam, after the screening, about a half dozen young black women from Brazil surrounded me—literally surrounded me—"We're the people your films are waiting for. We are the audience." I practically cry every time I tell the story. I did cry then because that's the point. That's the point of hanging on to things, right? I could not have predicted them, but I had a sense that maybe my film would find its way to whoever needed it.

This conversation was conducted by Hanna B. Hölling and Jules Pelta Feldman in January 2022. Questions contributed by Emilie Magnin.

Notes

1 With *Drylongso* (1998), which follows a young African American woman on her quest to photograph the endangered species of African American men, Smith gained the attention and esteem of critics, as well as popular audiences.

2 Experimental composer, musician, and bandleader Sun Ra (born in Alabama in 1914), a pioneer of Afrofuturism, led a shifting ensemble called The Sun Ra Arkestra from the 1950s until his death in 1993. Chicago was the site of some of his most formative work. The Arkestra continues today under the leadership of Marshall Allen.

3 The performance or "flash mob" shown in Smith's film took place on a public plaza in Chicago's Chinatown. The marching band also performed at other sites in Chicago.

4 The other work Smith refers to is *Black Utopia LA* (2010–23).

5 During the Whitney Biennial 2017, Smith's banners were hung from the ceiling of the museum's main gallery and lobby—a memorable arrangement registered by many visitors to the show. See Siddhartha Mitter, "Waking Life: Siddhartha Mitter on the Art of Cauleen Smith," Artforum 57, no. 9 (May 2019): 244-251.

6 *Remote Viewing* relates the story of a town that tried to erase all evidence of the Black community that once lived there by burying a former schoolhouse.

7 Simon Rodia built what are called the Watts Towers in Watts, Los Angeles between 1921 and 1954. They are celebrated today as a masterpiece of outsider art. In 1965, Watts was the site of the "Watts Rebellion" (then referred to as the "Watts Riot"), in which Black residents, resisting arrest, expressed long-simmering resentment of their abuse by police and poor municipal services. The California Army National Guard was called in to suppress the uprising. 34 people were killed.

8 "Cauleen Smith Imagines a Black, Feminist Utopia," film interview with Cauleen Smith, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2020, https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/cauleen-smith-imagines-a-black-feminist-utopia-2/.

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