

Beyond lifetimes: who do we exclude when we keep things for the future?

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Beyond lifetimes: who do we exclude when we keep things for the future?

Abstract

This article challenges a dominant narrative of conservation: that keeping things for longer is better. Approaches common in the heritage sector, such as risk management, support cautious patterns of behaviour that generate unintended consequences that can create further barriers to already excluded groups. Museums control and shape how present-day users engage with each other through their collections, but conservators can become disconnected from this process because of our concern about protecting value for future unspecified users. Conservators cannot opt out of taking sides when faced with cultural inequality, and must either accept or challenge it. Predicating actions for unknown future beneficiaries is neither always necessary nor positive and unless we change our practices and acknowledge past inequalities, users of the future will look a lot like users of today, with the current exclusions as described by the 'decolonise the museum movement' remaining endorsed. Creating a positive goal for conservation by creating connections with and via collections enables conservation to contribute to current participatory museum practices. If conservators re-position their perspective from a commitment to extending the lifetimes of objects to extending the life-experiences generated by them, they can offer a focus in which past inequality rather than future beneficiaries becomes a determining criterion of how long we keep things. By way of a brief overview of relevant theory, the article is intended as a call-to-action for conservators to join debates about cultural rights, oppression and privilege raging in and around the heritage sector.

Keywords

conservation; exclusion; decision-making; connections; decolonisation; lifetimes

Introduction

Conservators have been drawn into conflict with many colleagues by positioning their role as serving the future through their relationship with the tangible aspects of things. Conservators are often concerned with preventing predicted changes. This concern runs through conservation from small observable acts in practice, such as the management of touch, to inconsistencies in how we integrate theory into practice. This article addresses ideas familiar to many in the conservation sector: that heritage items can have multiple and changing meanings, and the significance of a piece of cultural heritage does not solely lie within its tangible form. Both have consequences for what this means in terms of change, damage and loss. The future is inherently uncertain and yet our stewardship of heritage feels driven by a sense of moral imperative to serve it, even when that future consumption may never arise.¹ This heuristic can prevent us from serving the now-living, and the risks of their exclusion are insufficiently factored into conservation decision-making. Conservators may have felt comfortable in the past in believing themselves to be neutral albeit passionate advocates for their work, but this is a faux neutrality. One first step in addressing this lack of neutrality must be to examine our role in relationships of power and control and consider if our practices support any existing structural disadvantage in the wider society. The argument presented here is that conservators can connect to wider social agendas 'to be stewards of heritage and shifting economic and political tides',² with a commitment

¹ Cornelius Holtorf, 'Preservation Paradigm in Heritage Management', in *The Encyclopaedia of Global Archaeology*, ed. Claire Smith (New York: Springer, 2014).

² Erica Avrami, Randall Mason, and Marta de La Torre, *Values and Heritage Conservation: Research Report* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Insti-

(Received 3 September 2019; Accepted 11 August 2020)

tute, 2000), https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/valuesrpt.pdf (accessed 14 July 2020).

3 Australian ICOMOS, *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, The Burra Charter, 1979*, <https://australia.icomos.org/publications/burra-charter-practice-notes/burra-charter-archival-documents/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

4 Australian ICOMOS, *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, The Burra Charter, 2013*, <https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2020).

5 Avrami, Mason, and de La Torre, *Values and Heritage Conservation*, 69.

6 Sanchita Balachandran, 'Race, Diversity and Politics in Conservation: Our 21st Century Crisis' (paper presented at the 44th AIC Annual Meeting, 16 May 2016), <http://resources.culturalheritage.org/conservators-converse/2016/05/25/race-diversity-and-politics-in-conservation-our-21st-century-crisis-sanchita-balachandran/> (accessed 14 July 2020).

7 Miriam Clavir, 'Preserving Conceptual Integrity: Ethics and Theory in Preventive Conservation', *Studies in Conservation* 39, suppl. 2.53 (1994): 53–7, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/sic.1994.39.Supplement-2.53> (accessed 14 July 2020).

8 ICOMOS, *The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)*, <https://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2020).

9 Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 167.

to more participation and inclusion only if we rethink the way we currently integrate the idea of 'serving the future' in our practice and ethics.

Multiple and changing meanings

The sense that heritage does not have a fixed characterisation but one which is identified by—and for—people is common within the heritage literature. With the first Burra Charter in 1979 it was argued that conservation plans should be informed by an understanding of the significance of a place.³ Over the years the Australian International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has developed the charter and associated guides to offer greater insights into how to determine significance. In the 2013 version its guidance identified that:

'values may be "shared" or be distinctly different. In some instances values will be conflicting. ... Establishing the conservation requirements for a range of values can be challenging and tensions may arise concerning the emphasis placed on the different values in the assessment and conservation process.'⁴

Other conservation bodies such as the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) have engaged practitioners in an examination of the relationship of values with heritage conservation, concluding that it is only possible to manage conservation if it is understood as a 'social process'.⁵ They recommend that conservators should seek to preserve heritage by involving multiple stakeholders in discussions of value and that they must acknowledge that the 'meanings and functions' of heritage can be contested and that conservation decisions need to negotiate such societal differences. Sanchita Balachandran, speaking to the American Institute of Conservation (AIC) in 2015, noted that it is common to acknowledge that objects have multiple values and meanings for different people, but that this understanding remains abstract within art conservation. She argued that as a profession we have been:

'slow to recognize that objects are not merely a sum of the materials that they are made from, but rather, that their "intangible" values may in fact be as important, if not more important than the tangible heritage we've trained to conserve.'⁶

Tangible and intangible aspects of value

Miriam Clavir argued in 1994 that the conservator's duty to the physical integrity of an object was complimented by their duty to its conceptual integrity and that this perspective provided grounds to challenge both 'standard museum practice and modern museum thinking'.⁷ Her writing, inspired by working with indigenous cultures, challenged conservators to understand that abstract and changing meanings are things that conservators could work to conserve. Also in 1994, the ICOMOS *Nara Document on Authenticity* stated that 'all cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression which constitute their heritage, and these should be respected'.⁸ In 2005, Salvador Muñoz-Viñas argued that if conservators approached their role from the perspective of the tangible alone, they would deprive objects of what makes them important.⁹ He went on to explain that as there are several truths within an object it is a preliminary step in the conservation process to decide which of them should prevail.¹⁰ Such restatements about values in the conservation literature make it clear that a principle of mutuality of respect for different values should be incorporated within a values-based conservation practice. However, what is tangible, concrete and measurable still remains a dominant aspect in the current conservation paradigm, and

any review of the latest editions of various conservation journals will reveal the profession's comparative comfort in its focus on technical analysis and physical intervention.

Loss, change and damage

There are many research projects—from both a technical and a philosophical basis—that illuminate that how people evaluate change may not conform to traditional ideas of damage and longevity. At University College London (UCL) a research group that considered damage functions identified that the public assess damage differently according to the context in which the object or collection was located.¹¹ Similarly, within critical heritage theory researchers have identified that any evidence of ageing is often perceived as a quality of a 'pastness' which influences how people perceive that heritage.¹² Researchers have proposed that the public's response to wear and tear, or damage,¹³ is that tangible change provides evidence of past use and adds validity to the thing. Such research illuminates how a materials-based response to repair a tear or fill a loss may offer little value in some contexts and in others may erode a positively perceived quality of 'pastness'.

Definitions of damage in the sector are quite varied but it is widely accepted that 'damage is non-beneficial alteration'.¹⁴ This definition reveals 'damage' more as an alteration negatively evaluated by humans rather than only as an alteration to the material status of the thing. Unfortunately, these human evaluations are complex and difficult, and tie damage to an equally broad quantity of perceived value. Value is obviously a very human judgement, defined differently by individuals or groups, changing over time, and can be contradictory. For example, the value of a museum object is multidimensional and is as much derived from how it is experienced as it is from how it is used. Wrestling with a plurality of changing concepts and values is difficult, leaving many conservators to rely on their own evaluation of material change as a working definition of damage. The complexity and uncertainty of value and its relation to what is perceived as desirable or undesirable change can lead to a heuristic shortcut that mobilises a definition of damage based on measurable effects. Indeed, for some in the sector, such a definition may feel safer as it appears factual, quantifiable and removed from any contradictory and changing aspect of significance and value. So, while in many individual cases conservators will discuss the value of patina or wear patterns, acknowledging the life journey that an object represents, decisions to clean things to expose their 'original' surfaces are commonplace. Conservators must ask what the consequences are of acting on ill-defined concepts of damage and loss that are justified in terms of the benefits to be achieved in an unknown future.

Material changes are the outcomes of processes that the profession largely understands. For example, because a fluctuating relative humidity changes the moisture content in organic materials leading to their distortion, detecting it can be an early sign of trouble. Understanding the principle causes of these processes means that changes like distortion can be prevented, bypassing the need to quantify it in value terms. Conservators deploy monitoring systems to detect conditions that may cause change, undertaken in preference to the challenging practice of monitoring 'damage' itself. This results in conservators undertaking some reasonable procedures and actions: monitoring, reporting, training, adjusting. These measures are all valid, but they can also generate a reputation about conservators being the people who place restrictions on a range of activities and practices with the goal of preventing an as yet unknown occurrence. The danger for the profession is that as our detection systems become more sophisticated, we shift from measuring a change of state to predicting

10 Muñoz-Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 175.

11 Matija Strlič et al., 'Damage Function for Historic Paper. Part I: Fitness for Use', *Heritage Science* 3, no. 33 (2015), <https://heritagesciencejournal.springeropen.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s40494-015-0062-1> (accessed 14 July 2020).

12 Cf. Cornelius Holtorf and Anders Högberg, 'Archaeology and the Future', in Smith, *The Encyclopaedia of Global Archaeology*, 8.

13 Note that wear, tear and damage are the very things that conservators are sometimes tasked to mediate or disguise.

14 See, for example, British Standards Institution CEN BS EN 15898:2019 *Conservation of Cultural Property—Main General Terms and Definitions* (BSI 2019).

a change of state, evolving finally into a fear of crossing those parameters that we use to predict a change of state. This can lead to a situation where monitoring and managing the indicators becomes the goal, losing sight of actual value being protected. The existence, or not, of damage becomes side-lined and the imagined need for specific conditions, such as 55% relative humidity, are elevated to almost mythical status.

The quantifiable aspects of this approach in preventive conservation can be understood as attractive when managing large collections and presenting data to managers. This is not unconnected to the urge to categorise value in numerical terms for the purposes of collection management.¹⁵ This process, however, can divorce the active monitoring of, for example, environmental indicators from the reporting of describable non-beneficial alteration. If this results in a conservator standing in their own store wondering 'Is my object being damaged in a way I currently cannot see but someone might be able to detect at some point in the future with equipment I don't have?',¹⁶ then they are dealing with existential doubt that can be managed by either following the rules, collecting and analysing information intelligently, or consoling themselves emotionally. If, however this translates itself into a cautionary approach such as insisting on conditions for a borrowing institution that in effect asserts that 'you can only borrow this object if you can deliver conditions that we have no real evidence that this object needs', then this approach moves from self-doubt to active prohibition and exclusion. By blocking a loan in these circumstances, it becomes certain that what is predicted, but unknown, will not happen. However, nor will any wider benefit associated with the loan and what appears as cautionary becomes an act of exclusion as the ability to control environments at a mid-range humidity and moderate temperature is fundamentally linked to climate and resources. Institutions located in non-European climates, or those without sufficient infrastructure and resources to deliver specific climates, and the audience they serve, will be specifically disadvantaged. This is exclusion: the very real consequences of a precautionary approach.

Privilege and the illusion of neutrality

1 Museums are not neutral

There is a growing campaign, *Museums are not Neutral*, that powerfully advocates that we do not manage our cultural heritage in a neutral environment.¹⁷ This is substantiated in, for example, the 'Panic Report' of 2018,¹⁸ which found that in the UK only 2.7% of museum, library and gallery staff were of black and minority ethnic origins which compares poorly with a reported 19.5% in society.¹⁹ Employment in London, where the vast majority of conservation posts are in the UK,²⁰ is far more accessible to those of an upper middle class background, while the audience for culture is made up of the upper middle classes and those who identify as 'creatives', rather than the working class. In the UK white people visit museums more often than black and Asian people,²¹ and upper socio-economic groups more than lower,²² suggesting that museums are a resource disproportionately consumed by a narrow and already privileged sector of society. In the United States the picture is similar and Nina Simon quotes from a 2008 survey that showed that 'audiences for museums, galleries, and performing arts institutions... are older and whiter than the overall population'.²³ Although there are reports of visiting museums contributing to wellbeing across the social spectrum,²⁴ other authors argue that the wellbeing normally associated with museums reflects their visitors already advantaged status in society and that such 'wellbeing' is a diagnostic of privilege rather than an outcome of their particular experience.²⁵ Whilst that discussion merits significant exploration beyond the scope of

15 Cf. for example, CyMAL Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, *Why Do We Have It? A Significance Process and Template* (Welsh Government Crown Copyright, 2013), 16–8, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-08/why-do-we-have-it-a-significance-process-and-template.pdf> (accessed 30 June 2020).

16 Cf. Jane Henderson, 'Reflections on the Psychological Basis for Suboptimal Environmental Practices in Conservation', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 41, no. 1 (2018): 32–45.

17 See the *Art Stuff Matters* website, 'Museums are not Neutral', <https://artstuffmatters.wordpress.com/museums-are-not-neutral/> (accessed 30 June 2020); and La Tanya S. Autry and Mike Murawski, 'Museums Are Not Neutral: We Are Stronger Together', *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 5, no. 2 (2019), <https://editions.lib.umn.edu/panorama/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2019/11/Autry-and-Murawski-Museums-Are-Not-Neutral.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2020).

18 Orian Brook, David O'Brien, and Mark Taylor, *Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries Arts Emergency* (2018), <https://createlondon.org/event/panic-paper/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

19 In the 2011 UK Census, 80.5% of people in England and Wales said they

this article, it does raise the question as to whether increasing access without levelling the playing field simply results in additional benefits being delivered to those in society who already have access to the majority of resources and opportunity? Museums have recognised how selective access can operate and some have taken steps to broaden accessibility such as with the display of Manchester Museum's elephant in a railway station to highlight the value of museums to the general public on an equal opportunity basis.²⁶ Nonetheless the point stands, if more access is code for more advantages for the already privileged then the assumption of the 'essential good' of access should at least be up for debate.

In the UK, the 2011 report *Whose Cake is it Anyway?* was commissioned by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to carry out an in-depth observational study of the way that museum professionals encourage participation by their 'community partners'.²⁷ A striking metaphor emerged from the study when one participant commented that the approach of museum staff was as if the museum and its resources belonged to the staff who then rationed out the experiences that users could access. They described the museum resource as a cake held by the staff where community partners queued passively to receive an allocated slice of benefit. The report concludes:

'If our museums and galleries are, as this metaphor suggests, owned, produced and distributed by staff to a passive public, decades of participation-targeted investment has not hit the mark.'

This metaphor clearly positions the custodianship of collections not as caring for the heritage on behalf of the community, but as heritage professionals retaining ownership and control of *their* collection. These cases and many others being debated in the sector underline a persuasive perspective that museums are not neutral, and that museum staff remain doggedly in the role of the powerful dishing out access to collections to the less powerful.

2 Conservation is not neutral

Having examined the role of heritage organisations in general the question should also be asked are conservators neutral? Fletcher Durant presented a review at AIC 2019 on this topic, examining a huge range of conservation and related publications,²⁸ particularly from North America, to expose what the sector writes about conservation:

'Examining our literature, our membership discusses non-White, American and Canadian heritage and creators in only about 3% of the evaluated research, even as we claim a mission of universality in protecting and advocating for cultural property. And almost half of that small number comes out of work done on indigenous cultural property by the teams at the National Museum of the American Indian, the Arizona State Museum, and the UCLA/Getty program.'

His devastating results starkly illustrate how conservators publish on the conservation of items made by the most powerful groups in society, while typically excluding people of colour and other more diverse creators to an extent that is significantly out of proportion to their representation in society. If it can be assumed that the things conservators publish about is representative of the materials that they work on, then the work of conservators is as shaped by traditional paradigms of power and privilege as other aspects of the work of their museum and cultural sector colleagues.

Even the conservation decisions we make are formed within the context of dominant patterns of thought. The removal of 'dirt' is the ultimate non-reversible process yet is the starting point for so many conservation treatments, removing signs of trauma and neglect: in effect cleaning up

were White British, and 19.5% said they were from other ethnic minorities, see <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest> (accessed 14 July 2020).

²⁰ Christina Rozeik, content of a paper delivered at Icon 19 and reproduced on twitter 1 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/christinarozeik/status/1156994749183778816?s=20> (accessed 30 June 2020).

²¹ For 2018–2019 a UK government survey found that 51.1% of white people had visited a museum or gallery, compared with 33.5% of black people and 43.7% of Asian people, see <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/culture-and-heritage/adults-visiting-museums-and-galleries/latest> (accessed 14 July 2020).

²² A UK government survey found that adults from the upper socio-economic group are more likely to visit a museum or gallery (61.5%) compared with adults from the lower socio-economic group (37.4%), representing a difference in engagement between the two groups of 24.1%. Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Taking Part Focus On: Museums and Galleries, Statistical Release October 2016*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/562676/Focus_on_museums_and_galleries_final.pdf (accessed 14 July 2020).

²³ Nina Simon, 'Preface', *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010), <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/preface/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

²⁴ See, for example, Sarah Desmaris, Laura Bedford, and Helen Charterjee, *Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing: A Second Report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing* (London: Arts Council England, 2018), <https://museumsandwellbeingalliance.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/museums-as-spaces-for-wellbeing-a-second-report.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2020).

²⁵ See, for example, L. Harald Fredheim, 'Endangerment-driven Heritage Volunteering: Democratisation or "Changeless Change"', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24, no. 6 (2018): 619–33.

²⁶ Although some might question the origin of the elephant and the role of



Fig. 1 'The Lombok Treasure' in the Rijksmuseum (image courtesy of Aly Singh).

UK economic exploitation in its acquisition. See, for example, 'Ever Seen an Elephant in a Train Station? Maharaja A Moving Story', <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/ever-seen-an-elephant-in-a-train-station-maharajaha-moving-story/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

27 Bernadette Lynch, *Whose Cake is it Anyway? A Collaborative Investigation into Engagement and Participation in 12 Museums and Galleries in the UK* (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2011), <https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/whose-cake-anyway/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

28 Fletcher Durant, 'Conservation Is Not Neutral (And Neither Are We)' (paper presented at the American Institute of Conservation Annual Meeting 2019 (IR@UF2019)), <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00010800/00001> (accessed 14 July 2020).

29 See, for example, Jane Henderson and Tanya Nakamoto, 'Dialogue in Conservation Decision-Making', *Studies in Conservation* 61, suppl. 2 (2016): 67–78, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00393630.2016.1183106> (accessed 15 July 2020).

30 See, for example, the declaration released in 2002 by 18 major international museums, *Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums* against the repatriation of holdings and reproduced in, for example, Peter-Klaus Schust, 'The

history. One exhibition which breaks this pattern can be found in the Rijksmuseum, where a caption reads 'The scorched coins and bracelets on display are silent witness of the atrocities of war'. This caption is placed next to tarnished silverware, with the decision on their conservation bearing witness to a tarnished history (Fig. 1). This acknowledgement of the interrelationship between the object biography and its material condition is not unique but it remains rare that the explicitly political factors in the conservation decision criteria are shared in a caption.

Other studies of conservation decision-making confirm that whilst conservators are generally prepared to consult source/originating communities to establish definitions of value and to shape arrangements for storage or display, the profession offers a fairly strict hierarchy of technocracy when it comes to input into decisions about treatments.²⁹ The evidence suggests that conservators tend to privilege the input of those whose expertise we recognise. Whilst we might allow a broader range of stakeholders to help us frame significance statements, in the event of a conflict it is all too easy to fall back on traditional roles and symbols of power.³⁰ Sanchita Balachandran commented that conservation has tended to avoid engagement with contemporary issues, hiding behind the 'safety of our benches' and using technical assessments to avoid facing more complex social assessments.³¹ Many in the conservation profession,³² including students and emerging professionals, recognise this as an issue but are perhaps less confident to make connections between conservation practice and the wider decolonisation in museums movement.³³ As conservators are rarely involved in the acquisition of items, selections for display, or authoring captions, many of the more obvious decolonisation practices are outwith their sphere of influence, perhaps leaving conservators wondering how best they can engage. Robyn Bushel argues that those involved in conservation must address questions of 'who should arbitrate on what is important, what should be protected, who should be entitled or empowered to make such decisions and through what processes'.³⁴ She identifies that the decision of who is authorised to speak for heritage is a privilege that generates significant ethical and philosophical concerns. Simply accepting

that the framework in which we work is not neutral is a starting point as it creates the opportunity to reflect on how many familiar practices may be exclusory. Recognising that the framework is stacked unevenly means that when operating within it, an assumption of 'neutrality' is tantamount to maintaining an uneven status quo.

While to many the process of conservation may feel intrinsically neutral, even the most fundamental preventive tasks of caring for an object and attempting to hold it 'as is' can be politicised by context. The decision to *keep* is a political one and one that can, at times, be in conflict with its origin- and belief-communities where the value or significance of an object lies within its decay.³⁵ Even when the concept of keeping as a benefit is agreed in principle by all stakeholders, the act of retention can symbolise a political act of acquisition. The 2002 declaration from 18 museums from North America and Europe on 'the Importance and Value of Universal Museums' has engendered much debate about the rights and roles of Western institutions in representing world cultures.³⁶ The declaration offers a rationale for the retention of world collections in Western museums, regardless of how they came to be there, and represents the attempts by powerful groups of museum directors to intellectually defend the refusal of repatriation claims. Within this declaration is a telling phrase regarding objects collected under conditions that are 'not comparable to current ones', with the declaration noting that:

'Over time, objects so acquired—whether by purchase, gift, or partage—have become part of the museums that have cared for them, and by extension part of the heritage of the nations which house them.'

This encapsulates the argument that the act of caring for objects transcends responsibility for any previous action of acquisition and justifies the retention of objects within the institution currently holding them. It also demonstrates that, despite conservators traditionally having no part in the route, method or decision to acquire these items, they are institutionally made complicit in this retention by their acts of care. This voids conservation from any neutrality as it is used as part of a rationale for erasing ownership.

Conservators and permission

If neither museums nor conservation practices are neutral, then the mechanism by which interactions are managed deserves scrutiny. It is not uncommon for conservators to discuss their willingness, or otherwise, to let audiences physically interact with collections in a way that is framed in terms of whether individuals are *allowed by the conservator* to touch heritage objects or not.³⁷ In other aspects of conservation decision-making there is an attempt to quantify and manage interaction with objects normally related to the measurement and analysis of tangible changes. Management of light dosage, for example, considers how many 'Just Noticeable Fades' should be allowed per generation, and the management of relative humidity can be associated with dosages of damage that describe change in terms of the lifetime of an object.³⁸

Conservation and access are managed either as the fair parcelling-out of use-benefit over time or in terms of permissions granted or withheld. Permission and access are loaded and socially charged issues that can speak of power and control, therefore these approaches and their place in conservation practice arguably require examination.³⁹ To illustrate, there is an illuminating case study on access to the Glamorgan Archives in Wales, where staff worked with an advocacy group, *Cardiff People First*, to investigate the records of Ely Hospital, a home for adults with learning difficulties that was

Treasures of World Culture in the Public Museum', *ICOM News* 1 (2004): 4–5, <https://studylib.net/doc/13485051/the-treasures-of-world-culture-in-the-public-museum-4> (accessed 10 August 2020); also see, for example, Annie Hall, 'Ethical Considerations in the Treatment of a Tibetan Sculpture', *V&A Conservation Journal* 40 (2002), <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-40/ethical-considerations-in-the-treatment-of-a-tibetan-sculpture/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

³¹ Balachandran, 'Race, Diversity and Politics in Conservation'.

³² For example, for the UK's Institute of Conservation's 2019 conference, themes included: 'Challenges in Supporting and Leading Diversity and Socio-economic Groups in the Conservation Sector'; 'Keeping up with Societal Cultural Consumption: Barriers in Connecting Conservation to the Wider Social, Economic and Political Environment'; 'The Role and Responsibilities of the Next Generation of Conservation Thinkers and Practitioners, and Identifying Barriers Between them and the Current Heritage and Cultural Environment'. See <https://icon.org.uk/events/icon-conference-2019/call-for-papers> (accessed 30 June 2020).

³³ Cf. for example, Elisa Shoenberger, *What does it Mean to Decolonize a Museum?*, posted 15 June 2020 on the Museum Net website, <https://www.museumnext.com/article/what-does-it-mean-to-decolonize-a-museum/>. See also Wayne Modest, 'From Conservation to Care: Rethinking Conservation in the Age of Decolonisation' (paper presented at ICCROM's 31st General Assembly 2019), where he argued that 'relatively little attention has been given to "de colonising conservation"'; see <https://www.iccrom.org/projects/thematic-discussion-decolonizing-heritage> (both accessed 30 June 2020).

³⁴ Robyn Bushell, 'Heritage Values, Communication of', in *Encyclopaedia of Global Archaeology*, https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-51726-1_1932-2 (accessed 3 August 2020).

³⁵ See for example Emily O'Reilly, Rose Miller, and Judit Bodor, 'Curation, Conservation, and the Artist in Silent Explosion: Ivor Davies and Destruction in Art', *Studies in Conservation* 61, suppl. 2 (2016): 167–73, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00393630.2016.1188250>; and Nicole Tse et al., 'Preventive Conservation: People, Objects, Place and Time in the

Philippines', *Studies in Conservation* 63, suppl. 1 (2018): 274–81, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00393630.2018.1476963> (both accessed 15 July 2020).

36 Cf. Schust, 'The Treasures of World Culture in the Public Museum'; for a critical discussion of the 'Declaration' see, for example Neil Curtis, 'Universal Museums, Museum Objects and Repatriation: The Tangled Stories of Things', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21, no. 2 (2006): 117–27, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09647770600402102> (accessed 10 August 2020).

37 See, for example, the recorded discussion on *The CWord Podcast S05E06: Touchy Feely* (The C-Word 2019), a UK-based independent online conservation forum, <https://thecword.show/2019/05/29/s05e06-touchy-feely/#t=00:00> (accessed 30 June 2020).

38 See, for example, Boris Pretzel, 'Ephemeral or Permanent? Illuminating the Bullerswood Carpet', *V&A Conservation Journal* 39 (2001), <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-39/ephemeral-or-permanent-illuminating-the-bullerswood-carpet/>, and Douglas W. Nishimura, *Understanding Preservation Metrics* (Image Permanence Institute, 2011), https://s3.cad.rit.edu/ipi-assets/publications/understanding_preservation_metrics.pdf (both accessed 15 July 2020).

39 Cf. for example, Sioned Hughes and Elen Phillips, 'From Vision to Action: The Journey Towards Activism at St Fagans National Museum of History', in *Museum Activism*, ed. Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 245–55.

40 *Cardiff People First at the Glamorgan Archives* (film makers unknown), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6rO_JUFzmo (accessed 30 June 2020).

41 Cf. Jane Henderson and Robert Waller 'Effective Preservation Decision Strategies', *Studies in Conservation* 61, no. 6 (2016): 308–23, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/2047058415Y.0000000019> (accessed 15 July 2020).

42 When the change in colour, or fading, of a collection item is visible to the eye it is described as Just Noticeable Fade, cf. for example, National Library of Australia, *Policy on the Illumination of Collection Material on Display*, <https://www.nla.gov.au/policy-and-planning/illumination-of-collection-material> (accessed 10 August 2020).

closed following investigations into the ill-treatment of patients. The moving interaction of the group's members with records of their own or their family's incarceration was recorded and made into a compelling and award-winning short film.⁴⁰ In the film the researchers involved can be seen touching documents, and one man cries over a human rights document that he contributed to and which began his transition from near-prisoner to active self-advocate. Most conservators would judge this contact as being more important than any 'damage' that happens from the interaction. We can all make such emotional judgements and intuitive responses are invaluable, but with them comes psychological bias.⁴¹ Given the uneven playing field, there are compelling reasons why the sector needs to be more adept at making strategic, systematic and consistent decisions about access without neglecting or discarding the value of human emotion and connection. Conservators who can consistently articulate the place of access within conservation decision-making might then gain more authority within their organisations to enact conservation practice that is better aligned with other organisational goals.

Exclusion and the agents of deterioration

1 Light

Conservators value informed decision-making. In partnership with heritage scientists, conservators have measured the impact of a range of agents of deterioration on the materials of our cultural heritage and are able to calculate exposure parameters to mitigate their alteration and change. Light budgeting is one such example; calculations enable the correlation of levels of illumination with visibly detectable changes on light sensitive materials, allowing the conservators to specify illumination levels and exposure time which will generate only one Just Noticeable Fade (JNF).⁴² This entirely logical approach necessitates some sacrifice in the present in order to share resources with the future. Unfortunately, while there are laudable aspects to this intergenerational equity, it also results in exhibitions of light sensitive materials being kept at levels of 30–50lux in which many visitors, especially the older and visually impaired, struggle to see. Some museums try and meet this challenge by holding events with higher illumination: special visiting times where older and visually impaired visitors can participate in activities on an equivalent basis with their peers.⁴³ Anecdotally speaking, museum staff acting with good intentions will nudge the illumination levels down to be 'safer' for the objects, unaware that this negates the carefully negotiated compromise between visual acuity and managed fading. Even the generally ubiquitous 50lux light level privileges those with good vision, the young and the able-bodied. If we get beyond the assumption of 50lux, we can still ask questions about light allocation: should the metric for the allocation of perceptible change be offered to those in the greatest need; or the greatest number of people; or the current and loyal users; or those who have previously gone without? When considering an approach based on 'rationing' it is valuable to reflect on who has the greatest need and who consumed most of last year's ration.

2 Handling; pollutants and physical forces

Handling offers many forms of access. As the *Cardiff People First* example demonstrates, it can offer connection and emotional meaning, as well as offer opportunities to learn how something feels, whether it is hot or cold, heavy or light, flexible or stiff. These sensations might integrate into learning such as 'can you imagine what it was like to be a Roman soldier wearing this armour to march long distances?'. Touch can form part of the cultural experience itself, and there are many sites and artefacts

where kissing, rubbing or touching a particular part of an object is considered to generate luck, success or devotion. Such repeated touching leads to tangible changes as in the rubbing away of patina or staining of the surface, which can be seen by some to increase the value of the thing.

Given the multitude of benefits of touch it is fascinating that the 'no touch rule' seems so prevalent in museums in many cultures. There are many problems associated with a 'no touch' culture. Touch and feel can help develop skill acquisition, critical if traditional skills are not to be lost: by touching and interacting with something you can investigate how, for example, a scythe works to cut hay. Allowing or withholding touch privileges therefore controls access to tacit knowledge. People with little experience of museums and who have not learnt 'the rules' can be perceived by staff as more threatening than established visitors,⁴⁴ resulting in the uninitiated being less welcome than the well trained. Another problem is that while some are allowed to touch (the conservator, for example) this privileged access represents their elite and powerful status in contrast to those outsiders considered less skilled or less valued. Managing touch is another example of enforcing privilege and exclusion and conservators and others need to reflect on what exclusions are embedded within their habitual work.

3 Dissociation

A wider perspective on damage or loss in value can be created by focussing on the one 'Agent of Deterioration' which addresses intangible change, dissociation. Described as the only 'metaphysical' agent of deterioration, dissociation relates to loss of either things or information about things; it defines the problems that arise when things become disconnected to information that provide them with meaning.⁴⁵ Yet how well do cultural heritage institutions manage the continuity of meaning as well as maintaining the continuity of something's physical condition? Imagine the following scene in a museum displaying an omnibus from 1912. The bus is gleaming: it looks clean, all the paint is there, the upholstery and fittings are intact, there are no scratches, barely a fingerprint. At some level the bus is undamaged. Yet it is sterile, looking like it has never been outdoors, never leaked oil, never smelt of passengers eating chips, never been raced home at the end of the day to finish a shift. Such 'clean' representations strip the object of its meaning and raise the question of whether stripping such associative meanings is possibly one of the most significant forms of damage? On how many occasions does conservation profess to protect meaning but in practice protect only physical integrity? Is the shortcut of protecting 'original material' for the future disguising a decision-making process that avoids the complex and contradictory aspects of value? Is it time to rethink the assumptions underpinning conservation decision-making?

Risk management and endangerment

The approaches and tools currently available to conservators to systematically manage change to avoid unnecessary loss of value encourage them to focus on what might go wrong in the future. Using risk management, the sector has made great progress in being better organised, presenting evidence-based solutions and seeking out new forms of data. Risk management inevitably means conservators are managing risks, which is a very short step from becoming responsible for those risks. The profession's concern for the careful management of change results in the situation where it often falls to the conservator to articulate the negative consequences of some activity rather than the one considering the activity in terms of the opportunities it presents for learning, self-actualisation or fun. This 'Casandra' approach of warning of impending doom can only

43 Cf. Pretzel, 'Ephemeral or Permanent?'

44 Cf. Fiona Candlin, 'The Class Politics of Touch' (paper presented at AHRC Workshop, *Touch and the Value of Object Handling*, University College London, 2006), https://culturehealthresearch.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/ucl_touch_workshop_1_abstract.pdf (accessed 15 July 2020).

45 Cf. Robert Waller and Paisley Cato, *Agents of Deterioration: Dissociation*, Canadian Conservation Institute, Government of Canada, 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/agents-deterioration/dissociation.html> (accessed 30 June 2020).

⁴⁶ In Wikipedia, Cassandra is described as a figure from 'Greek mythology cursed to utter prophecies that were true but that no one believed'. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassandra> (accessed 30 June 2020).

⁴⁷ Rebecca Fifield, presentation in the session *Centring Value in Collections Care*, 47th AIC Annual Meeting on 14 May 2019.

⁴⁸ Cf. for example, Sarah May, 'Heritage, Endangerment and Participation: Alternative Futures in the Lake District', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26, no. 1 (2020): 71–86, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13527258.2019.1620827> (accessed 15 July 2020).

⁴⁹ For example, BSI 2012 PAS 198:2012 *Specification for Managing Environmental Conditions for Cultural Collections*, published by The British Standards Institution in 2012, states that 'good management of environmental conditions can extend the lifetime of even sensitive materials'. The strategy sets out an agreed understanding of the 'expected collection lifetime', that is, 'the length of time over which the usable life of collection items can be prolonged by means of preservation measures'. It also states that 'PAS 198 aims to provide an effective framework for managing the preservation of collections over the expected collection lifetime as the highest priority'.

⁵⁰ See the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, *ASHREA Handbook—HVAC Applications Chapter Museums, Galleries Archives and Libraries*, ed. Heather Kennedy (Atlanta: ASHREA, 2019), 24.

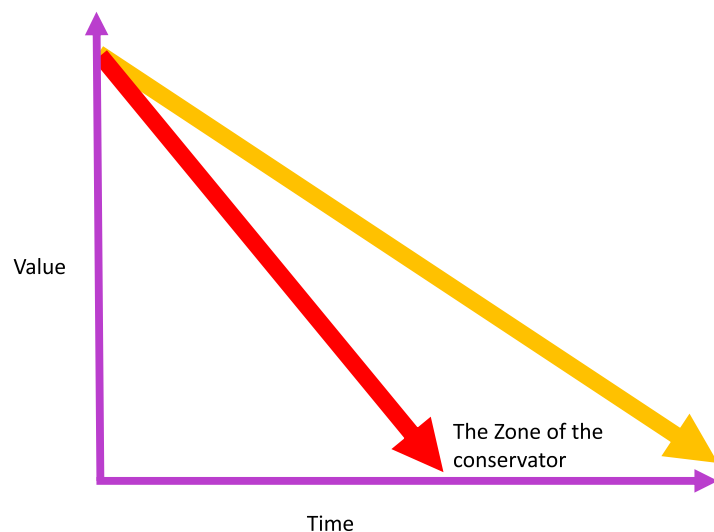
lead to two possible and equally undesirable outcomes.⁴⁶ Either we achieve grim satisfaction and association with negative outcomes when they occur, or we experience a reduction in credibility if the predicted negative consequences do not manifest themselves. This association with the problematic is a difficult position from which to manage effective advocacy and perhaps sometimes conservators may be better advised to say nothing when they can predict a problem while knowing they are unlikely to be able to prevent it. Predicting and becoming associated with negative outcomes arguably inhibits the ability to form partnerships to rectify any problems that do then materialise, and speaking at the annual AIC conference in 2019 Rebecca Fifield cautioned:

'When we position ourselves by developing working attitudes of "we know you are going to screw up your job, that's why this field exists and I like to show off mad skilz/equipment" we are almost heading off that potential for workable relationships.'⁴⁷

The risk management approach that currently dominates preventive conservation decision-making consistently drives conservators into narratives of 'endangerment'.⁴⁸ This term encapsulates the framing of heritage as being inherently vulnerable, underlining the belief that use damages collections, with this assumption provoking the conclusion that it is the conservator's role to prevent loss by policing interaction.

Privilege and lifetimes

It is not uncommon within conservation to discuss the concept of lifetimes.⁴⁹ Conservation can be characterised as the act of extending the lifetime of an object where 'the primary goal of preservation is to prolong the existence of cultural property'.⁵⁰ This is a near default assumption that there is a fundamental good in keeping things longer. The practice of conservation, of slowing the rates of decay and extending the useable life of an object, can be represented on a simple diagram of value and time (Fig. 2). Conservation success can then be represented as the additional life-



Arrows represent different rates of the loss of value over time

Fig. 2 Diagram of loss in value over time. The red and yellow arrows represent the relationship of value and time. The red arrow shows loss in value over a shorter time and the yellow arrow represents a longer period before the loss in value is experienced, representing the conservator's input.

time of something that the conservation measure creates, extending the time before unacceptable loss in its value occurs. This description of conservation 'success' separates conservators in organisations from their colleagues because it delivers benefits for the future, while those colleagues deliver benefits for everyone in the present.

To illustrate this point, in the UK, English Heritage's (EH) strategic plan offers four commitments, two of which are around conservation and inspiration. It is interesting to compare the language used to characterise these two goals. The headline commitment for conservation is:

'we'll make sure our historic sites and artefacts are expertly cared for so that they can be enjoyed by future generations.'

For the 'inspiration' goal, EH state:

'we'll create inspiring and enjoyable experiences for everyone. We'll do this at our sites, online and in print, enabling people of all ages to share in and pass on the story of England.'⁵¹

If conservation practice is committed to some future benefit, then a conflict is set up with other agencies in the sector to the detriment of serving the present. Sarah May's concept of endangerment suggests that we describe the value of cultural heritage in terms of the threats to its existence, resulting in all engagement with it being constrained by the inherent pessimism that something will be lost.⁵² Conservators know that some aspects of use will lead to loss, and the concept of a 'just noticeable fade' embodies this, but the profession operates as if the longer it takes for a loss to occur the better managed the preservation has been. Yet all participation relating to culture heritage will lead to change. Does conservation's commitment to extending the lifetimes of things pin us to an outdated perspective where access and preservation are in conflict? Such an approach will set conservators at odds with the goals of their colleagues, placing them outside the missions and values of their institutions. If we build our collection management strategies on the idea that future users are more valuable than present-day ones, is it any surprise we appear to be the 'nay-sayers' within our organisations?⁵³

The conservation profession must scrutinise the idea that keeping things longer is inherently better. Conservation is a young profession so conservators in long-established institutions have, until recently, had the luxury of inheriting collections where the most fugitive items have already decayed or been disposed of, meaning the collections that conservators were charged to preserve were generally more resilient. In contrast, museums undertaking contemporary collecting make acquisitions that are unaffected by the tests of time and from the moment the objects are acquired conservators become responsible for their preservation. This presents fresh practical and conceptual challenges.

Within the cultural heritage sector things in collections may have little substance, or be more about creating ephemeral sensations or experiences, with no fixed material iteration rather recreated or repurposed around concepts more than things.⁵⁴ Collected items from contemporary art to industry can be vulnerable, conceptual or consume themselves. Some materials, constructions or media cannot survive very long because of their composition, design or purpose. Some things were created with the intent that they will decay and to fail to recognise and respect that decay is to fail to conserve an integral part of their value. Some artefacts being considered for conservation exist only in the present,⁵⁵ while for others use is part of their value and so using them is the most ethical way to conserve them.

51 As pointed out by Amber Rowe in a personal communication discussing the English Heritage *Securing Our Future Strategic Plan 2019–2020*, <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about-us/our-priorities/> (accessed 15 July 2020).

52 May, 'Heritage, Endangerment and Participation'.

53 Cf. Murray Frost, 'Working with Design Professionals: Preventive Conservators as Problem Solvers, Not Problem Creators', in *Preventive Conservation: Practice, Theory and Research. Preprints of the Contributions to the Ottawa Congress, 12–16 September*, ed. Ashok Roy and Perry Smith (London: IIC/Archetype, 1994), 21–3.

54 See for example, the artist Katie Paterson's project *Future Library 2014–2114*, <http://katiepaterson.org/portfolio/future-library/>. See also, 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://www.tandfonline>.

[com/doi/full/10.1080/19455224.2019.1604396](https://doi.org/10.1080/19455224.2019.1604396) (both accessed 30 June 2020).

55 Cf. Hélia Marçal, 'Conservation in an Era of Participation', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 2 (2017): 97–104, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19455224.2017.1319872> (accessed 15 July 2020).

56 This example is suggested by the Big Pit National Coal Museum's *Underground Tour*, <https://museum.wales/bigpit/tour/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

57 See Kyle Lee-Crossett, *Collecting Change/Changing Collections, Report from a Workshop 17th July*, UCL Institute of Advanced Studies (Heritage Futures IAS, 2018), https://heritage-futures.org/app/uploads/2019/01/Collecting_Change_Changing_Collections_R.pdf (accessed 30 June 2020).

58 For a wider discussion of this theme see, for example, Aliakbar Jafari, Babak Taheri, and Dirk vom Lehn, 'Cultural Consumption, Interactive Sociality, and the Museum', *Journal of Marketing Management* 29, no. 15–6 (2013): 1729–52, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0267257X.2013.811095> (accessed 16 July 2020).

It is time to move away from conservation existing as a service to the future. Some conservators of the present are already engaging with the ephemeral and trying out approaches that integrate the temporary. The 'longest lifetime' approach to conservation is much more problematic, and possibly even irrelevant, for things like time-based media where art works exist in dormant, active and installed conditions or where the lifetime is a specification of the art piece itself. Although contemporary art has presented recent specific challenges, the concepts such art represents have existed for conservators for many years. For example, decisions about the use and activation of an item could be seen to apply to many mechanical and industrial items such as a coal mining pit head gear, where the performance of raising and lowering the cage is more important than the retention and reuse of any individual component.⁵⁶

The examples raised here demonstrate how there are many implied cultural assumptions when we talk about sharing benefits with the future. A conservation strategy that assumes there is virtue in keeping something for an unknown future is flawed and change is needed if we are to increase the diversity of our present-day users.⁵⁷ Unless the scope of what conservation does changes drastically, users of the future will look a lot like users of today, predominantly white privileged, educated, Western, well-resourced and able-bodied.

A new paradigm: life-experiences

In a complex world people make social connections of different intensities and with different relational meanings and this can be theoretically represented as a pattern of networked nodes (see Fig. 3). Museums and similar heritage sites are places where visitors make interpersonal connections, and this theme of 'connection through cultural consumption' helps to understand how museums are a people-orientated social context.⁵⁸ By engaging with ideas of social consumption we can frame the museum experience as one where visitors seek social connection during their visit with objects and collections acting as the connectors that enable communication between nodes of people and wider communities. Nina Simon chal-

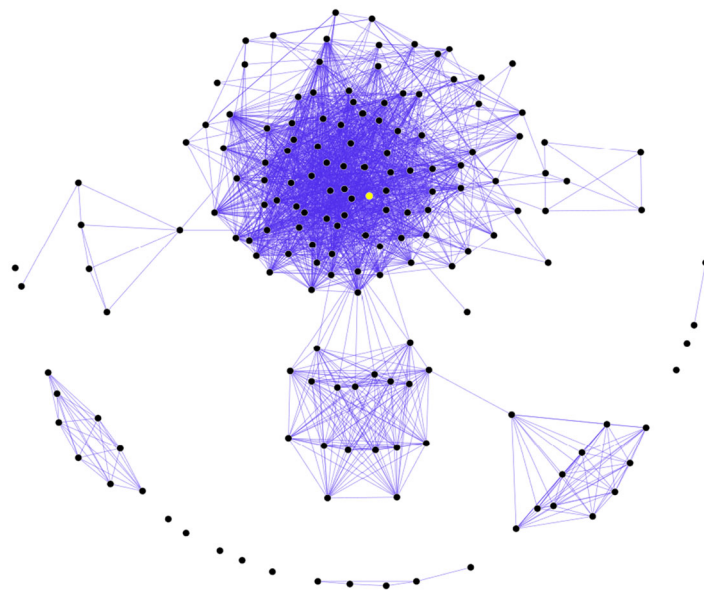


Fig. 3 Complexity of relationships between people and communities represented in a fictional social network diagram. CC BY 3.0, Darwin Peacock, Maklaan.

lenges us to think of museum objects themselves as being 'social' and to consider value in terms of their 'ability to spark conversation', which supports the description of the value of an object not only residing in the tangible thing but in its intangible ability to mobilise new interpersonal relations.⁵⁹

Following this logic, can we reconfigure the rhetoric of conservation so that it is preservation of those connections that underpins our ethical duties? And when conservators manage risk in a traditional way, are they cognisant of how they can damage the delicate filaments of connection in order to privilege physical continuity? Conservation can shift its core approach from extending lifetimes to managing the care of life-experiences by recognising how we can value the learning, experience and emotions that come from museum collections. Conservators can then work to ensure that people have access to these experiences without making any assumption about the value of future users over current users. Such a change would also underline that access should mean more than across temporal domains but also across cultural, racial, economic and social ones too.

By moving from managing lifetimes to managing life-experiences, conservators would be liberated to work with collections that are intrinsically ephemeral. The move to accept life-experiences on equal terms with lifetimes would create a rationale from which to measure and describe how the conservator contributes to carefully managed access and still delivers benefits for users. It creates an opportunity to assert 'this object has two decades left at most so let us work out how we enjoy it best now' and deliver care more strategically by then asking, for example, 'what memory of it can we keep afterwards'? The move also enables conservators to recognise and respond to the fact that heritage is 'blurred, converging and transformed by contemporary movements and mobilities'.⁶⁰ As many societies are challenged by a profound rejection of the continuation of past discrimination to revisit the evidence of that past, we can question what and how its tangible remains should be presented, interpreted and even retained. It is vital that conservation's ethics are able to respond to the convergences and transformations taking place within the societies in which it operates.

This 'conservation for life-experience' perspective allows conservators to rethink the 'longest lifetime' paradigm. Some communities express their frustration that this approach of keeping things longer for more (of the same) people to experience them is considered more important than the life-experiences of those who have a more intense, personal connection with them:

'What he [the anthropologist] collected, he took elsewhere. It is not in the Museum India Vanuire. So, this is our struggle ... As we managed to start our own museum [Wowkriwig Museum], and god willing, we will be able to build it the way we planned, we want our objects back. They belong to our people. So, he [the anthropologist] has to return them. Because they do not belong to him. That is ours. It is gold. Of our people.'⁶¹

Informed decisions

People working in heritage are just as affected by heuristic decision-making biases as anyone else. Any occurrence that is predicted to result in a reduced lifetime will be experienced as a loss and will inevitably generate concern. Even if we compare this loss with the benefits that may be generated, our loss aversion bias will ensure that such tangible change losses are felt more significantly than the access gains.⁶² If we can reframe the problem to avoid a presumption of loss (to possible future users) then it

⁵⁹ Nina Simon, 'Social Objects', in *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010), <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter4/> (accessed 30 June 2020).

⁶⁰ Cf. Russell Staiff and Robyn Bushell, 'Heritage Interpretation and Cross-cultural Translation in an Age of Global Travel: Some Issues', *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 21, no. 4 (2003): 104–22, cited in Bushell, 'Heritage Values, Communication of'.

⁶¹ Dirce Pereira cited in Ana Carolina Delgado Vieira, Marília Xavier Cury, and Renata Peters, 'Saving the Present in Brazil: Perspectives from Collaborations with Indigenous Museums', in *ICOM CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints, Copenhagen, 4–8 September 2017*, ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2017), <https://www.icom-cc-publications-online.org/PublicationDetail.aspx?cid=>

6c43bbd7-13bb-45f9-90d1-1887afe755f8 (accessed 16 July 2020).

62 See, for example, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk', *Econometrica* 47, no. 4 (1979): 263–91, <https://courses.washington.edu/pbafhall/514/514%20Readings/ProspectTheory.pdf> (accessed 16 July 2020).

63 Cf. Jane Henderson, Robert Waller, and David Hopes, 'Begin with Benefits: Reducing Bias in Conservation Decision-making', *Studies in Conservation*, forthcoming supplement: IIC 2020 congress preprints <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00393630.2020.1787638> (accessed 1 September 2020).

will be possible to minimise the impact of this bias. Revisiting Fig. 2 in this article we can decide that adding more life expectancy need not be the only goal or criteria for judging the success of conservation.

Use benefits from collections are varied: they can range from the learning that can be derived from engaging visibly or via tactile interaction or the inspiration that might arise from perceiving the item or the wonder or privilege drawn from encountering it. Institutions gain benefits from the use of objects in blockbuster exhibitions, handling collections or for scientific research. Use benefits can exist both now and in the future, and in recognition of this the graph can be redrawn by adding another vector of 'success'. Taking the two-directional Value/Lifetime graph and representing it as a tri-directional Value/Lifetime/Life-experience graph will help conservators and their colleagues to conceive of—and represent—decisions about an item's use on a more equitable basis.

In this tri-dimensional representation (Fig. 4), giving access to generate more life-experiences can be portrayed as a positive outcome ensuring that any conservation measures implemented in this process contribute to, rather than conflict with, the outcome. In this simple act, accepting that extending benefits to different users, and offering greater benefit to current users, is not inherently more or less valuable than extending those benefits to future users.⁶³ While the imperative remains for conservators to define and manage the rate of loss an item suffers, the model simply removes the temporal insistence that benefits must exist in the future. The use-benefit has the potential to have equivalent or greater value in the present than if retained for an unknown future. We can shift our ethical rationale to managed change for a range of users including those of the present for whom lack of access has been a measure of their exclusion.

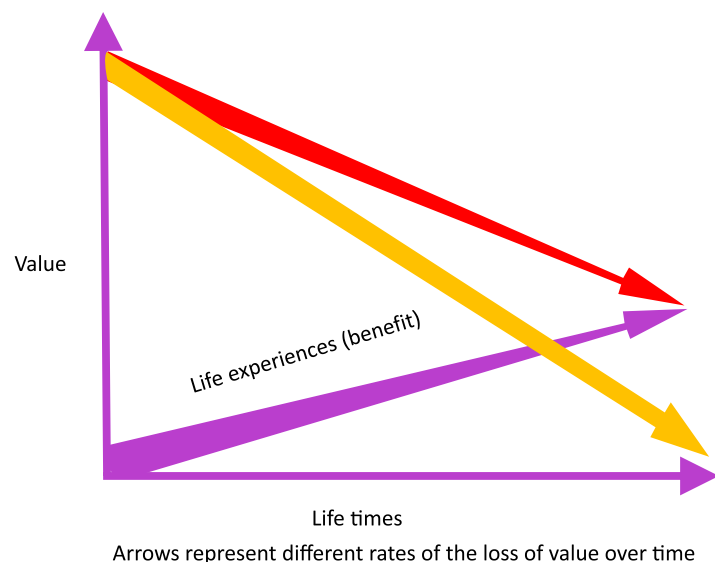


Fig. 4 Diagram of value, time and experience showing both as positive outcomes. The yellow arrow shows the relationship of value and object lifetime to represent how conservators manage loss in value over longer lifetimes. The purple arrow represents the additional dimension life-experiences and the red arrow represents managing loss in value over increased life-experiences.

Case studies

Conservation decisions are always made in a context where the task of preservation will be informed by a significant range of variables. Two case studies will illustrate how privileging the possibility of increasing life-experiences over the traditional 'longer lifetime' approach might help influence change in the decision-making process.

1 Hoa Hakananai'a

This case study arises from a tweet from educator Alice Proctor about an interaction within an exhibition in the British Museum between visitors, the basalt ancestor figure Hoa Hakananai'a and museum staff.⁶⁴ Someone had left gifts for the sculpture and the museum staff had put a Perspex box over them. This was described by Proctor on Twitter as 'pinning live culture'.⁶⁵ Another perspective might have been that this action was the result of a risk assessment by a considerate conservator who understands, for example, the agents of deterioration, and sought to mitigate risks from pests and contamination using a classic tool of preventive conservation, a clear plastic box. The progress we have made from a time when the gift might simply have been swept away is welcome, but does the outcome mediate between the museum's needs and the concerns of whoever left the gifts? Or is it just a mediation of the agents of deterioration without a real integration or understanding of the object and its associative meanings? Was the risk of such dissociation included in the risk assessment? The challenge of dissociation takes a 'universal museum' into difficult territory as discussions around the meaning of such objects with stakeholders will inevitably lead to the expression of concern that the act of placing it in a museum and removing it from its created landscape has already destroyed its spiritual value.⁶⁶ In terms of longevity a museum, especially one as carefully managed as the British Museum, will offer the best preservation conditions for many lifetimes of access. However, if the benefits are framed in terms of life-experiences, the quality of the experience of this object in the museum as one of thousands of objects encountered in a single visit may measure less strongly against the benefits of its return to a location for which it was designed in an area populated by a people with the closest emotional and spiritual connect to the artefact, for whom the object 'is gold'. Offering life-experiences as a goal for conservation is radical and fundamentally disruptive to the aims of any universal museum.

2 Banksy

The UK street-artist 'Banksy' made what was claimed to be his first artwork in Wales, in the industrial town of Port Talbot. The art appeared on the corner of a breeze-block garage in a residential area. Approaching from the road the art appeared to show a small child looking excitedly upwards into snow, appropriate for Christmas, the time of its creation. Walking around the corner exposed the source of the 'snowflakes' as emanating from a pollution-generating brazier. The art appeared overnight and on the first day that tolls had been removed from the bridge between the artist's hometown and South Wales. As soon as it appeared two things happened: people flocked to see it, and the discussion started about how to 'save' it. The public debate was framed purely in terms of 'saving it' by removing it to a gallery, and where would that gallery be? Journalists, the public and the by then very stressed garage owner made ready assessments of the threat from various agents of deterioration. The risk from physical forces was high, the high level of contaminants/pollution locally as identified by the artwork itself, the rainy environment, and the danger of theft all featured very high. In lifetime terms a (careful) removal of the work to a gallery would inevitably extend its tangible qualities long into the

⁶⁴ For the British Museum's online catalogue entry see: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=512302&partId=1 (accessed 30 June 2020).

⁶⁵ Tweet by Alice Proctor on 20 December 2018, <https://twitter.com/aaproctor/status/1075407107673993221?s=20> (accessed 16 July 2020).

⁶⁶ See, for example, the Agence France-Presse article, 'An Easter Island Governor Begs British Museum to Return Moai: 'You Have Our Soul'', *The Guardian*, 21 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/20/easter-island-british-museum-return-moai-statue> (accessed 30 June 2020).

Dimensions of Authenticity				
	Location and Setting	Forms and Design	Use and Function	Immaterial Qualities
Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Place ▪ Setting ▪ 'sense of place' ▪ Environmental niches ▪ Landforms and vistas ▪ Environs ▪ Living elements ▪ Degree of dependence on locale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spatial layout ▪ Design ▪ Materials ▪ Crafts ▪ Building techniques ▪ Engineering ▪ Stratigraphy ▪ Linkages with other properties or sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses(s) ▪ User(s) ▪ Associations ▪ Changes in use over time ▪ Spatial distribution of usage ▪ Impacts of use ▪ Use as a response to environment ▪ Use as a response to historical context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Artistic expression ▪ Values ▪ Spirit ▪ Emotional impact ▪ Religious context ▪ Historical associations ▪ Sounds, smells and tastes ▪ Creative process

Fig. 5 The Hoi An protocol dimensions of authenticity (UNESCO).

future. Yet within the public debate there was little acceptance of other features, which are useful to draw out with the help of UNESCO's Hoi An protocol which sets out a table of dimensions of authenticity (Fig. 5) that characterise other less tangible aspects of value.⁶⁷

The emotional impact is of a child exposed to pollution—pollution so bad it seems that art work cannot be left in it—and there are specific historical associations that connect the art to the removal of the bridge tolls and to Christmas, with the viewer standing at the garage connected to the sounds, smells and tastes of the pollution. The spatial layout creates the startling truth when approached from the road. The art was designed around the garage, and it depends on the location and vistas to underpin its commentary on life in Port Talbot. Each of these qualities would be compromised by removal to a gallery, and in fact it was removed and to date has not reappeared in the public sphere. The benefits of keeping the work in situ for consumption by the thousands of visitors was not considered sufficiently valuable compared to the aspiration to keep for an unspecified future. This is particularly frustrating as many of these visitors exactly match audience-profiles described as being 'hard to reach' but who clearly had no difficulty in reaching art when it was placed in their daily context, free to visit and without the rules and conventions of gallery visiting. The possibility of any more of these life-experiences has now ended and they were never really quantified. The question posed elsewhere by Cornelius Holtorf, 'can the consumption and use of heritage for present benefits be more important than its preservation for the future?' was not addressed.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ UNESCO, *Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia: Professional Guidelines for Assuring and Preserving the Authenticity of Heritage Sites in the Context of the Cultures of Asia* (Bangkok: UNESCO, 2009).

⁶⁸ Holtorf, 'Preservation Paradigm in Heritage Management'.

Conclusion

My ambition for conservation is to place more emphasis on preventing the agent of deterioration 'dissociation' and to work harder to reduce the risk of stripping intangible value and meaning from our heritage. There is no automatic ethical requirement for conservators to keep things as long as possible, and we should stop talking in those terms. Life-experiences should be of equivalent concern as 'longer lifetimes' because it is the way that objects connect people that creates their value. The act of preserving connections between people and communities that cultural heritage enables should become the default. Protecting life-experiences could be integrated

easily into our existing ethical frameworks and could underpin a shift to work towards 'a more pluralistic, divergent, community centred profession'.⁶⁹

Conservators can express a 'use it and enjoy it' narrative confidently without undermining any other messages. A conservator's ethical duty should be re-positioned in terms of devising strategies to help deliver activities with the minimum unnecessary negative consequences and by ensuring concepts of loss include both tangible and intangible aspects. Potential beneficiaries in the future should not be offered higher consideration than those excluded from access to heritage in the present-day.

I believe that if conservators are to have an effective presence in the wider cultural and creative sectors, they need to share their mission and value-statements more carefully. For many organisations, their mission aims to build museums as social spaces supporting connectivity and acting to bring together individuals and communities. My concern about conservation's disconnection from this mission interrelates with my concerns about the lack of diversity both within the profession and the audiences conservation serves. The arguments presented here are meant to stimulate and develop conservation thinking on issues of what conservation does and who it does it for, adding a small nuance to our narratives and apparently virtuous desire to keep things longer. If access to cultural heritage is to be shared and not remain the prerogative of the privileged, conservators must examine their role in the expression of power and control over access masked by the current privileging of the future condition of objects over the present risks of dissociation. The cultural heritage is not ours; it is theirs. It is not our cake to box up nor to give away.

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Résumé

«Au-delà de la durée de vie : qui excluons-nous lorsque nous conservons les choses pour l'avenir?»

Cet article remet en question un crédo dominant en conservation: il vaut mieux garder les choses plus longtemps. Les approches habituelles dans le secteur du patrimoine, telles que la gestion des risques, soutiennent des modèles de comportements prudents qui génèrent des conséquences inattendues pouvant créer des obstacles supplémentaires pour des groupes déjà exclus. Les musées contrôlent et façonnent la façon dont les utilisateurs actuels interagissent les uns avec les autres à travers leurs collections, mais les conservateurs peuvent se couper de ce processus en raison de leur préoccupation de protéger la valeur pour de futurs utilisateurs inconnus. Les conservateurs ne peuvent pas choisir de ne pas prendre parti face à l'inégalité culturelle et doivent soit l'accepter, soit la contester. Prédire des actions pour de futurs bénéficiaires inconnus n'est ni toujours nécessaire ni positif et à moins que nous ne changions nos pratiques et que nous reconnaissons les inégalités du passé, les utilisateurs à venir

ressembleront beaucoup aux utilisateurs d'aujourd'hui, avec les exclusions actuelles restant à assumer telles qu'elles sont décrites par le mouvement « décoloniser le musée ». Définir un objectif positif pour la conservation en créant des liens avec et via les collections permet à la conservation de contribuer aux pratiques muséales participatives actuelles. Si les restaurateurs revoient leur perspective non plus d'un engagement à prolonger la durée de vie des objets mais à étendre des expériences de vie offertes par eux, ils peuvent offrir une perspective dans laquelle l'inégalité passée plutôt que les futurs bénéficiaires devient un critère déterminant de la durée de conservation des choses. Grâce à un bref aperçu de cette théorie, l'article se veut un appel à l'action pour que les conservateurs se joignent aux débats sur les droits culturels, l'oppression et les privilèges qui font rage dans et autour du secteur du patrimoine.

Zusammenfassung

„Jenseits der Lebenszeit: Wen schließen wir aus, wenn wir Dinge für die Zukunft bewahren?“

Dieser Artikel stellt ein vorherrschendes Thema der Bestandserhaltung in Frage: dass es besser ist, Dinge länger zu erhalten. Gängige Ansätze im Bereich des Kulturerbes, wie z.B. das Risikomanagement, unterstützen vorsichtige Verhaltensmuster, die die unbeabsichtigte Folge haben, weitere Barrieren für bereits ausgeschlossene Gruppen zu schaffen. Museen kontrollieren und formen, wie heutige Nutzer durch museale Sammlungen miteinander umgehen, aber Restauratoren können sich von diesem Prozess abgetrennt sein, weil wir uns um den Schutz der Werte für zukünftige

⁶⁹ Marcelle Scott, 'Normal and Extraordinary Conservation Knowledge: Towards a Postnormal Theory of Cultural Materials Conservation', *Bulletin of the Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material* 36, no. 1 (2015): 3–12.

tige, nicht näher spezifizierte Nutzer sorgen. Restauratoren können sich nicht dagegen entscheiden, Partei zu ergreifen, wenn sie mit kultureller Ungleichheit konfrontiert werden, und müssen sie entweder akzeptieren oder sich ihr stellen. Es ist weder immer notwendig noch positiv, Maßnahmen für unbekannte künftige Nutzer vorzuschlagen, und wenn wir unsere Praktiken nicht ändern und die Ungleichheiten der Vergangenheit nicht anerkennen, werden die Nutzer der Zukunft den heutigen Nutzern sehr ähnlich sehen, wobei die derzeit Ausgeschlossenen, wie sie von der "Entkolonialisierung der Museumsbewegung" beschrieben werden, weiterhin ausgeschlossen sein werden. Die Festlegung eines positiven Ziels für die Bestandserhaltung durch die Schaffung von Verbindungen mit und über Sammlungen ermöglicht es ihr, zu den gegenwärtigen partizipatorischen Museumspraktiken beizutragen. Wenn Restauratoren ihre Perspektive von einer Verpflichtung zur Verlängerung der Lebensdauer von Objekten auf die Verlängerung der durch sie erzeugten Erfahrungen umstellen, können sie einen Schwerpunkt bieten, bei dem die Ungleichheit der Vergangenheit statt der zukünftige Nutzer zu einem entscheidenden Kriterium dafür wird, wie lange wir Dinge aufbewahren. Mit einem kurzen Überblick über die relevante Theorie ist der Artikel als Aufruf an die Restauratoren gedacht, sich an den Debatten über kulturelle Rechte, Unterdrückung und Privilegien, die im und um den Sektor Kulturerberherum wüten, zu beteiligen.

Resumen

"Muchas vidas más allá: ¿a quién excluimos cuando guardamos cosas para el futuro?"

Este artículo desafía una narrativa dominante en conservación de que cuanto más tiempo se mantengan las cosas es mejor. Los planteamientos como la gestión de riesgos son usuales en el sector del patrimonio promoviendo patrones cautelosos de comportamiento, y generando consecuencias imprevistas que crean obstáculos para grupos ya excluidos. Los museos controlan y conforman cómo se relacionan los usuarios contemporáneos a través de sus colecciones. Sin embargo, los conservadores podemos desconectarnos de este proceso debido a nuestra preocupación por proteger el valor para unos futuros usuarios indeterminados. Los conservadores tienen que tomar partido cuando se enfrentan a la desigualdad cultural y deben aceptarla o desafiarla. No siempre es necesario predecir acciones para futuros beneficiarios desconocidos ni tampoco es positivo; y, a menos que cambiemos nuestras prácticas y reconozcamos las desigualdades pasadas, los usuarios del futuro se parecerán mucho a los usuarios de hoy, incluyendo actuales exclusiones descritas en los temas del movimiento 'descolonizar el museo'. La conservación puede contribuir a las prácticas participativas actuales de los

museos, generando objetivos positivos para la conservación mediante la creación de conexiones con y a través de las colecciones. Si los conservadores reposicionan su perspectiva desde un compromiso de extender la vida útil de los objetos a extender las experiencias de vida generadas por ellos, podrían ofrecer un enfoque en el que la desigualdad pasada, en lugar de los futuros beneficiarios, se convierte en un criterio determinante de cuánto tiempo guardamos las cosas. Junto a una breve descripción de la teoría relevante, el artículo pretende ser una llamada a la acción para que los conservadores se unan a los debates sobre los derechos culturales, la opresión y los privilegios sufridos dentro y alrededor del sector del patrimonio.

摘要

"生命之外：为未来，何应保留，何应排除？"

本文挑战了保存修复行业的主流思想——事物保留得越久越好。遗产领域的常用方法（如风险管理、支持谨慎的行为模式）会产生意想不到的后果——给已被排除在外的群体带来更多障碍。博物馆控制和塑造了当下观众与藏品的互动方式，但由于保存修复人员出于为未来非特定观众保留价值的关注，他们可能会与这一过程脱节。当面对文化不平等时，保存修复人员不能选择退出站队，必须接受或者挑战它。为未知的未来受益者所采取的行动既不总是必要的，也不一定是积极的，除非我们改变做法并承认过去的的不平等现象，否则未来的观众看起来也会像今天的观众一样——赞成当前不包括的内容，如“博物馆去殖民化运动”。通过与藏品建立联系并通过藏品建立保护的积极目标，可以使保存修复事业为当前参与性博物馆实践做出贡献。如果保存修复人员能够在立场上重新定位，将他们的观点从致力于延长物品寿命转移到延长其产生的生命体验上来，他们就能够形成一个焦点，即把过去的的不平等而不是未来的受益者作为我们将事物保留多久决定性标准。通过对相关理论的简要概述，该文章旨在号召保存修复人员加入有关盛行于遗产领域内外的文化权利、压迫和特权的辩论。

Biography

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