

Online Research @ Cardiff

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/142504/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Sweetnam, Ellie and Henderson, Jane ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3027-8452> 2022. Disruptive conservation: challenging conservation orthodoxy. *Studies in Conservation* 67 (1-2) , pp. 63-71. 10.1080/00393630.2021.1947073
file

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1947073>
< <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1947073> >

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies.

See

<http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.





Disruptive Conservation: Challenging Conservation Orthodoxy

Eleanor Sweetnam & Jane Henderson

To cite this article: Eleanor Sweetnam & Jane Henderson (2021): Disruptive Conservation: Challenging Conservation Orthodoxy, *Studies in Conservation*, DOI: [10.1080/00393630.2021.1947073](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1947073)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2021.1947073>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 12 Jul 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Disruptive Conservation: Challenging Conservation Orthodoxy

Eleanor Sweetnam  and Jane Henderson 

School of History, Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper takes the position that our current treatments that involve infilling with a neutral rather than matched colour are deceptive to the viewer and that such deliberate mediation through the act of conservation can deny the viewer an authentic understanding of the heritage object. Governing guidelines and documents describe authenticity as the alignment of the object and its story but for some practitioners, the concept remains tied to originality. Authenticity could be considered a fluid concept as it is built via the individual relationship between object and viewer. Many of the default approaches to conservation fail to address the fluidity embodied in the object and its representation of the passage of time. A lack of examination into the inherent biases of our work defends the *status quo* within our museums under a cloak of neutrality. *Disruptive conservation* is proposed as a challenge, exemplified by a jarring visible mend. It is an approach designed to disturb complacency. It calls upon analysis of our biases and challenges the consequences of freezing the meanings of our conserved objects. Placing the process of *disruptive conservation* into treatment dialogues enables conservators to account for the object's journey in how their intervention is portrayed. It stops the object from existing simply as a representation of the past and allows it to continue its evolution. The question 'Why don't I make this fill in hot pink?' is offered as a catalyst for an appraisal of an object's place and context without assuming or imposing a fake neutrality.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received January 2021
Accepted June 2021

KEYWORDS

Ethics; authenticity; neutrality; disruptive conservation; decision-making; gap-fill; meta-cognition; value



Introduction

Within an exhibition hall, a viewer may encounter artefacts in glass cases. The information label allows the viewer to walk away from these artefacts with the understanding of not only their form and function but their material, geographical location and time period. In placing objects in a museum, they become reconceptualised – existing as tangible and intangible entities connected to but separated from their past. What role do the conservator and the treatment process play in creating this (dis)connection between the entity and its outwardly apparent visual function?

Disruptive conservation is an approach to practice that is conceived as a provocation. It is a challenge captured by the question 'Why not paint it pink?' Challenging orthodoxy and contentment in conservation strategies, it is a process in which the conservator scrutinises values and normative treatments to disrupt the structures of our operating environment. *Disruptive conservation* seeks to expose and debate an object's alignment within past, present and future. It plays with the interactions among the object, owner and treatment, the nature of these relationships and how that may be translated into the physical form of the object's fabric. Examining the deceptive neutrality of our treatments through

the lens of disruptive conservation can expose the inherent biases and political ramifications that exist, often unacknowledged, within our practice. In posing a challenge to traditional conservation aesthetics the paper examines where visually jarring treatments would fit in within our ethical frameworks and by considering the ethics of a disruptive practice, the paper asks what implications this has for aspects of authenticity.

An object's journey to display can be compared to that of a boulder rolling down a slope. For it to reach the bottom, it must touch a series of points. These points of connection offer glimpses of an object's many meanings and the values associated with each stage of its journey. A recurring metaphor used throughout the paper is of a gap-fill in a low-fired archaeological ceramic. For this archaeological object, it begins with discovery and recognition, with the finder exposing the existence of the object as a tangible entity. Whether simultaneously or subsequently its value is then codified by attributing it to an association with a location, event, entity or time. Later the object enters a museum where more aspects of value and significance are reviewed and ascribed. A curator acknowledges its physical form and places a fixed interpretation upon it, and so the

CONTACT Eleanor Sweetnam  ellie.sweetnam@gmail.com  Department of Archaeology and Conservation, John Percival Building, Cardiff University, Colum Road, Cardiff CF10 3EU, UK

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

object is anointed as providing evidence of the past. It exists simultaneously as a functional artefact, a symbol and an historic document (Caple 2009). In the exhibition space, it meets the viewer. It reaches a place in the rolling narrative where 'it can continue to be used for education and enjoyment, as reliable evidence of the past and as a resource for future study' (Icon 2014, 1). At some point in this section of its lifespan since its discovery, the understanding we place upon it becomes codified and recorded, and its intangible values are shared via the work of the museum. It is realised as a multi-dimensional, multi-representational object. At what point in its journey is the object its authentic self? Is this an important or necessary concept for conservation and if so, how do we respect this in our interventions?

Conservators are only part of the narrative of an object's life, but they play an important one as they can change the value of the object. From the removal of particulates from a dusty book to the recovery of the functional shape of a corroded iron fitting, the consequences of our work are permanent. Conservation interventions, although as reversible and as well documented as possible, are irrevocable. Choices are made that determine the manifestation of the object. Conservation is an act of interpretation, in that the physical act of conservation affects the way in which an object is and can in future be experienced (Mairesse and Peters 2019). The fabric and construction of the object must be focussed upon, but it is its intangible values, its cultural biography and context that guide conservation decisions regarding the perception of an object (Spaarschuh and Moltubaak Kempton 2020). In conservation practice, the multiplicity of factors influencing decisions must be rendered as a single solution.

Disruptive conservation

The concept of *disruptive conservation* originally began as a reaction to the in-filling requirements of a Roman



Figure 1. Roman ceramic vessel excavated from Caerwent, Wales. Newport Museum and Art Gallery. Photograph by Sweetnam, E.

ceramic vessel (Figure 1) and has been built into a broader response to our treatment conventions at the University of Cardiff. The specific requirements were that the vessel be reconstructed and that any gap-fills be an 'off-white' within the tonal range of the fabric. The reaction by one of this paper's authors was that this request was an erasure of the conservation work that was to be undertaken. The neutral and milky reproduction of the whole vessel would erase the hand skills in the creation of the mend and all the associated research into the history, analysis, and stakeholder consultation. The authors discussed whether a neutral fill would present a false history by attempting to return the object to an abstract version of a previous life and fix it there as a static entity. This leads to the question: how should the conservator's relationship with the tangible object be presented to the viewer?

As a sector, conservators need to examine the relationship between perceived value and the metaphysicality that exists with objects. Asking the question, whether a treatment can become evidence of action impacting on the life journey of the object. While conservators and their work often deliberately minimise the visual impact of conservation treatment, made only perceptible through close examination, what does such subtlety signify? Is subtlety necessary or habitual? The *disruptive conservation* concept offers a thinking process, not a colour palette. It is a rejection of the automatic selection between neutrality or integration. Unlike tonal fills or carefully constructed *tratteggio* the proposal for a jarring discontinuous fill or repair aims to jolt the conservation process out of an acceptance of the banal normality so easily presented



Figure 2. Hiking socks darned with a hot-pink mend.

in heritage institutions. Can and should conservation be located visually as part of its continuing journey by making no attempt to ‘pickle the object in aspic’ or represent the museum exhibition as a final and fixed end point? Rather than reaching for subtlety: ask whether a hot-pink gap-fill (Figure 2) would signify the impact of conservation on the object’s journey. This paradigm shift presents the opportunity to explore the values embodied by an object that are retained or enhanced during conservation (Sully and Cardoso 2014).

Disruptive conservation is a consequence of thinking. It is not about the visible mend itself but is an expression of the need to reject our biases and to break away from the façade of neutrality that is presented in a context that is often far from neutral. While it need not take the form of a hot-pink mend, it asks conservators to push against obvious and traditional narratives, both in their decision-making and working process and in their institutional and social surroundings, to ask themselves what needs to be achieved differently.

The creation of authenticity

Authenticity is an abstract notion. Muñoz-Viñas wrote that ‘the only authentic state of the object is tautologically the one that it has now’ (Muñoz-Viñas 2002, 26). To exist in the current present is to be authentic within whatever state is current. Other writers argue that for an object to be experienced or considered as authentic, then it must be marked as authentic (Scott 2015), that is, someone, somewhere, must have judged this object to be the authentic version of itself. Defining authenticity with reference to the concept of originality limits it to a point in time where ‘original’ refers to the moment of creation (Scott 2015; Auffret 2019) and has been rejected as a basis for conservation practice. Whilst early definitions referred to authenticity being tied to originality; European standards make a clear distinction, defining authenticity as the ‘extent of alignment between the object and the identity attributed to’ (BSI 2019, 19), and originality as the ‘extent to which an object’s properties match those at the time of its formation’ (BSI 2019, 19) and they are not to be confused with each other (BSI 2019).

Jones and Yarrow argue that authenticity is a cultural construct that emerges through the interaction between the item of cultural heritage and the viewer, dependent also on context (Jones 2010; Jones and Yarrow 2013), thus fixing authenticity as a subjective concept. Such a perception-led definition opens the door to multiple possible perceptions of materiality, shaped by personal social and cultural experiences. Malkogeorgou notes that the relationship between the object and the observer is never static, and it is

this movement that implies the subjective aspect (Malkogeorgou 2002). Scott presents authenticity as having three foundations in material, historical and conceptual aspects that must be considered together to avoid fragmentation of meaning (Scott 2015). Scott examines both objective and subjective authenticity. He notes that a subjective definition of authenticity opens it to multiple and conflicting views because what one person may regard as authentic may differ from another but ‘if it is regarded as a completely objective concept, then there are potential difficulties in persuading people with conceptual views of what authenticity means into accepting that there can be any such thing’ (Scott 2015, 291). Given that people with conceptual views of authenticity exist then the only response to these mirrored approaches is to accept that for at least some people there is a subjective version of authenticity linked to their own perceptions. Once linked to the viewer, authenticity represents their perceptions rather than a self-contained quality of the object as itself. Like the creation of value, authenticity is non-linear much as value is non-homogenous (Taylor and Cassar 2008) and so an object’s identity and authenticity evolve through time (Castriota 2019).

The concept of authenticity as an alignment between the object and the identity attributed to is reflected in the *Nara Document on Authenticity* (ICOMOS 1994), the *UNESCO Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO 2019) and the *Hoi An Protocol* which conceives authenticity as the alignment of the object and its story. The *Hoi An Protocol* states that authenticity can be ‘... understood from a matrix of dimensions of both tangible and intangible qualities. Together these form the composite authenticity from which significance derives ...’ (UNESCO 2009, 7). In the *Nara Document*, authenticity ‘appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values’ (ICOMOS 1994, 47). It is not possible to make judgements within fixed criteria as informational sources differ from culture to culture (ICOMOS 1994). The *Nara Document* and the *UNESCO Guidelines* state that our ability to understand these values rests on truthful and credible sources being used (ICOMOS 1994; UNESCO 2019) and that cultural values ‘are truthfully and credibly expressed through a variety of attributes’ (UNESCO 2019, 101). Therefore, for an object to be perceived as being authentic by the viewer, it must portray its truthful timeline with all its values present.

Authenticity is a fundamental concept for conservators whose interventions impact on both tangible and intangible aspects. Conservators control how authenticity is presented, and such power should not be enacted thoughtlessly. As authenticity seeks alignment with the presentation of an object and its identity, treatments designed to minimise the visual impact of

part of the story can be characterised as false or deceptive. An object's journey involves multiple interactions and multiple values, and its authenticity is created by viewers via their own individual relationship with the object. It becomes an individual concept understood through many layers of knowing, certainties and uncertainties. Wain and Sherring write that a 'perfect authenticity' cannot be achieved and must always be an approximation, based on what is considered most important in the present (Wain and Sherring 2020).

Conservation and uncomfortable truths

The widely held '6 inch / 6 foot rule' (15 cm/2 m rule), where conservation repair requires interventions to be unobtrusive from a distance but detectable upon closer inspection (Buys and Oakley 1993, 140) sits within paradoxical contrasts between visible / invisible or honest / dishonest regarding the tangible intervention and the place of the conservation treatment in the journey of the object. Our 'silent' (Phillips 1997) conservation treatments change how an object looks to a viewer, although this sometimes requires that close examination. What evidence are we providing that makes the existence of an entire lifespan accessible? The approach common in conservation is of subtle, integrated, or unobtrusive work that does not draw the eye but continues to exist, asking not to be discussed, like a shy elephant in the room. Are these approaches reliable or truthful and how do they align with issues of authenticity? Classical theories of conservation as an activity see its role as being that of a truth-enforcer (Muñoz-Viñas 2002; Muñoz-Viñas 2011), of which the goal is to reveal and preserve an object's 'true nature'. Conservation has also been described as knowledge-generating, investigations that precede decision-making being undertaken through both 'hard sciences and humanism' (Hölling 2017a). Thus, it has become a paradox, a continual process in which materiality is conserved to maintain the values that are embodied within heritage (Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre 2000). As it is conservators who have the skill set (AIC n.d.) to undertake the preservation of tangible aspects of cultural heritage, how do their actions affect this complex place of multiple values that have been assigned through the object's journey since its creation? In Phillips's forensic examination of artistic intent and variation in the perception of objects through time he notes that, of all the perceptual variations written upon the objects it is conservation that is almost always 'passed over in silence' (Phillips 1997). Indeed, he points out that strategies for conservation are most visible when exhibitions draw on collections from multiple institutions exposing their distinct approach through the contrasting conservation style. We believe that this lack of acknowledgement belies the philosophy, values and

hierarchies that sit (silently) behind conservation decisions.

Our current treatments could be characterised as a dishonest truth. Barber argues that unstated but implicit dishonesty undermines truth: 'Our focus instead should be on the boundary between what is and is not expressed in a communicative act, irrespective of whether it is actually said.' (Barber 2020, 142). When examining this communicative act, in this case, the act of conservation, the unobtrusive mend sits on a conceptual boundary. Considering the example of a neutral gap-fill, this creates a new state that tries not to draw attention, a partial and apologetic completion: neither returned to a sense of the original, nor presented as found. Such deceptive treatments present a false and conceptually abstract object to the observer and as such hide information. Extending knowledge about the act of conservation is an expressive act that contributes to truth and knowledge generation.

While the authors understand the urge to avoid visually disturbing fills to create a complete and calming aesthetic, we reject this as the default approach. The desire to quietly reintegrate reflects an inherent bias: that the damage is wrong; that the object should be displayed in some former state; and that conservation is neutral in achieving this outcome.

The 'Why not pink?' question goes against a key principle in Brand's framework, as summarised by Barassi, 'the unacceptability of creative conservation' that a conservator must never 'interpret the work subjectively, especially when it comes to filling in *lacunae*' (Barassi 2009, 1). Brandi offers absolutes when it comes to originality, creativity and authenticity in conservation. The concept of *disruptive conservation* is dialectical in that it proposes an approach to examining all the potentials within the conservation process and the reflection of the biases within our practice and place within the museum. The conservation of a rare medieval shrine at St Albans Cathedral, UK, features a figure with a mask, as a commemoration of 'reconstruction during the pandemic'.¹ While this may seem atypical for a restoration project, it is a perfect example of creative conservation and the potential interconnection between the object in question, conservator and time.

Disruptive conservation and codes of ethics

Conservation is a paradox of observable but unnoticeable interventions (Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre 2000). So too are our codes in that despite providing flexibility, they can and often do lead to conservative behaviour (Ashley-Smith 2017). Ethics provide not only a framework to guide actions and thinking (Clavir 2002; Henderson and Nakamoto 2016) but they are also intertwined with social structures (Clavir 2002). Laudable attempts to codify ethics have led to

checklists which are incredibly useful for new conservators or those who want to check if their practice is habitual and non-reflective. But to go beyond them into expert practice we must engage with the multi-layers and meanings associated with objects. Codes of ethics in conservation mainly refer to how the conservator negotiates the professional space, and rather than offering specific requirements, they set out a boundary of expectation rather than an outcome. The terminology used to describe the relationship between conservator and object: respect and integrity (AIC 1994; AICCM 2002; ECCO 2003; CAC and CACP 2009) captures different contexts that conservators must work in, while emphasising that they must link it to the object and its totality, which exists and moves through a multi-dimensional universe. *Disruptive conservation* presents a dichotomy with the treatment itself and the presentation of truth, making no attempt to blend in but instead asking conservators to account for their thinking, and to own their own work explicitly. If there is no deception, there is no ethical issue.

Frozen in time

When an object is placed in a glass case or in another way formally designated as ‘heritage’, it is labelled and defined in a way which has the effect of freezing it in time (Hölling 2017b): rarely is it allowed to continue to evolve. As Georgieva states, despite the fact that we admire buildings in which we can see and acknowledge additions and stratifications, these are not allowed to continue into the present and the future (Georgieva 2018). Moving deeper into the museum, traditional conservation can also be seen as the freezing of this object into only one specific time or even as the attempt at returning it to an ideal state (Auffret 2019). An alternative perspective argues that the authenticity of a place can be as much located in its fluidity and flexibility through adaptive reuse (Weiss 2020), or that creative relationships between old and new can lead to a flow of information about the object through time (Squassina 2021).

If we question any unexamined assumption that our intervention exists at an end point and locate our intervention as part of a fluid and flexible history (Weiss 2020) generating authenticity as a process of linked functions, we need not attempt to reflect a specific historical point in time through our interventions. As heritage ceases to be used for its original function, its new primary function becomes the transmission of messages about heritage (Wain and Sherring 2020). Wain and Sherring argue that both artwork and functional objects can be understood as performative objects and that the authenticity must ‘happen’ to be experienced (2020, 7), observing that whilst the tangible heritage of an object can be treated by a conservator the

intangible nature of an object needs to be performed (2020). But how does the static Roman ceramic vessel ‘happen’ for viewers so that they can have an authentic relationship with it? A disruptive intervention such as a visible mend allows the object to perform its original function while still being experienced by the viewer in a way that is new. Considering the example of a ceramic vessel: it may have been used as a container. The current tangible vessel is no longer able to hold such material nor perform an ‘original’ function. Although its old function can no longer to be performed, it can ‘happen’ in a new way for the viewer while still conveying multiple other concepts that it embodies. A visually disruptive mend acknowledges the continuous lifespan of the object, that marks its passage from creation, to use and discovery, through conservation to the glass case and finally to the experience. It becomes a new instance of itself (Castriota 2021), not a forgery of the original with the visible change authored by the conservator.

Visible intervention

The Japanese process of *Kintsugi* – the patch with gold – and *Kintsukuroi* – to repair with gold (Iten 2008) is perhaps one of the most well-known and celebrated visible mending techniques. This process draws from metaphysical relationships that are described as inherent within the Japanese psyche² and presents itself within the object’s materiality and so plays into the authentic presentation of the passage of time. *Kintsugi* and *Kintsukuroi* are deep-rooted cultural processes (Iten 2008; Kintsugisouke 2009; Keulemans 2016; Nilsson 2018). Although it would be impossible to separate the cultural origins from the practice there are lessons that can be taken from the concept and the practice. *Kintsugi* and *Kintsukuroi* are examples of the type of examination of our perception of an object, its relationship with the passing of time, events and actors in that process and it is this acknowledgement of multiple cultural processes that can, in turn, inspire, inform and develop evolving practices for all conservators.

Another example that aligns with the essential challenge of *disruptive conservation* is that of the painting *Grace* by Dave Hobrecht. Depicting a setting that was never captured via photo or video, the black and white painting shows Martin Luther King Jr, Don Newcombe, Roy Campanella and Jackie Robinson with hands clasped for grace with Martin Luther King Jr thanking them for their contributions to the civil rights movement. When the painting arrived at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, where it was unveiled, the canvas had broken during shipment and the bottom section had completely detached. A decision was made to keep this visible detachment and the work was reframed with ‘the two pieces

purposely pulled apart several inches' (Harris 2021). The purposeful portrayal of this break represented the trauma of the historical subject matter. A treatment outcome that is to be explicit is not an excuse for the treatment to be poorly executed: it is a process bound by the examination of our conservation processes as a whole and a reflection of our practice and the passage of time.

Exhibiting the conservation process

Conservation is often conceived as a separate act or a discrete entity from the object. While exhibitions, such as *Operation Night Watch* (Rijksmuseum, n.d.) or *Conservation in Focus* (Drago 2011) makes the conservation work explicit to the viewer, they do not address the substance here of the perspective being offered: *disruptive conservation* asks for more than acknowledgement, it suggests that the conservation becomes part of the physical narrative. Integrity is bound up with an honest acceptance of the totality of things. The conservation phase is part of the integrity of understanding the object. If 'conservators are always 'writing' the history of the object' (Villers 2004, 6), the act of conservation should be expressed clearly in a way that the observer can be expected to identify. If the truth that we present, and the values embodied within an object are never static and always changing (Malkogeorgou 2002; Taylor and Cassar 2008) then a disruptive mend takes its place in moving with the object through these changes. The extent of the object's retained fabric is not hidden by this act of conservation; it is merely that the treatment is recognised as well. The process of *disruptive conservation* recognises the object as a holistic and changed entity for the viewer to question, interpret and understand.

Conservation and neutrality

When the evidence of the object's history is written on its tangible features this is often presented on display as a softened or neutralised perspective: the jagged becomes softened, the *lacunae* are diminished, and



Figure 3. Reconstructed ceramic bowl in pink, next to an untreated broken bowl. Treatment undertaken by Sweetnam, E.

the jarring spaces subdued. Such a softening process may feel like a tendency towards a steady or neutral state, but they belie the process by which the *lacunae* were created. History is more than a steady state to slide into. History includes powerful stories of destruction, oppression and looting, captured and embodied in the collections encased in the galleries of the universal museums.

One of the greatest current challenges for conservation is a lack of diversity however it is characterised: when the sector takes a moment to examine its diversity it is apparent that conservation does not adequately represent the global population (ARA and CILIP 2015; AIC 2018; Andrew Mellon Foundation 2019). *Disruptive conservation* calls for the analysis of our biases, to recognise the multitude of values represented in every decision and to ask how an unexamined act of conservation can perpetuate a *status quo* built on colonial violence (Catlin-Legutko 2016). If we wish to deconstruct colonial privilege we must move away from 'the blindness of the everyday' (Stiem 2018) and work towards 'truth telling'. The concept of neutrality within our institutions has perpetuated 'oppression, racism, injustice and colonialism' (Autry and Murawski 2019). The guise of the concept of 'care', according to Das, 'is a violent and dangerous ethos' (Das 2021). That despite our best intentions, we can inadvertently cause harm to the objects we aim to protect. Choices made have been damaging and destructive (Meskell 2002). The act of 'keeping' objects is a political choice that is often in conflict with the object's origin or belief where its value lies in its continual decay and that despite our perceived benefit of 'keeping' it, this act can '... symbolise a political act of acquisition' (Henderson 2020, 7).

The reductionist materialist approach to conservation decision-making has characterised much of our official discourse and has promoted non-reflective practice. The analysis becomes a substitute for enquiry, and research into material properties and responses concur with past enquiries resulting in conservation tasks simply being just a closed loop of familiar practice. This has allowed conservation to set aside challenges that embody complexity and ambiguity while investigating systems with definable correlations such as decay mechanisms. Such an approach cannot inform aesthetic judgements nor mesh effectively with ethical decisions.

Many museum practices are rooted in power via colonial enterprises and so must be viewed as political spaces in which there cannot be neutral actors (Msezane 2017; Autry n.d.; Autry and Murawski 2019). The act of conservation within these spaces is not neutral (Muñoz-Viñas 2002; Jenson 2004; Villers 2004; Pye 2006; Avrami 2009; de la Torre 2013; Balachandran 2016; Durant 2020; Henderson 2020). By acting as agents for heritage: preserving historical evidence for

others to engage with, we believe ourselves to be doing *the right thing*, but we have gone unchallenged for too long, hiding from the safety of our benches (Balachandran 2016). In consultation with curators, owners and stakeholders, the decisions about an object's story are made (Durant 2020). This puts the conservator in a unique position of power but also potentially positioned in a power struggle. While conservators uncover values, it is those who are in positions of power who have the final say over which values are given preference, and which version of the past is presented (de la Torre 2013). Every decision that we make is a choice, and our justifications are about how we prioritise those choices (Figure 3). The comfort of an apparently neutral repair can be used to absolve us of responsibility and to avoid thinking critically (Durant 2020).

Conclusion

When our work reduces the visual impact of the conservation process, it reduces the evidence of action and as such does not allow for a truthful alignment of the past, present and future of the object, preventing its evolution. If a truthful version of an object is not being presented, then what becomes of authenticity? Non-reflective treatments can be perceived as an attempt at returning the object to a time that existed before the need for its conservation arose, which is deceptive to the viewer. Whilst conservation as a process does recognise the owner or creator, integrating the role of conservator in this relationship is one that is masked in traditional approaches. For philosophy to be integrated into conservation decision-making we have to offer the meta-cognition of the decisions that we are offering up for examination. Too often philosophy is separated from practical conclusions, with philosophy being very much left in the domain of philosophers. Yet for conservation to be a mature and reflective profession, we must be able to generate philosophical ideas and present them in our practical treatments.

Notes

1. *Covid: St Albans cathedral's new carving features face-mask*. Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-57023017>.
2. The first is that of *mono no aware*, the concept of aesthetic existence in Japan, '... a compassionate sensitivity, an empathetic compassion for, or perhaps identification with, beings outside oneself' (Bartlett 2008). The second is the connection to the principle of *mottainai*, regret experienced due to waste (Kintsugisouke 2009; Nilsson 2018). The third is the response to a connection with the land (Ishibashi 2004; Keulemans 2016) and finally, there exists the mindset of *wabi-sabi*, the becoming at peace with the progression

of time and the acceptance and beauty that comes from this change (Iten 2008; Nilsson 2018).

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to extend their thanks to Pia Edqvist and Ashley Lingle for their guidance and suggestions, and Phil Parkes for his critical support teachings which have aided in the development of this concept. The authors thank the reviewers for their critical eye and clarifications.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Eleanor Sweetnam  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3294-6645>
Jane Henderson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3027-8452>

References

- AIC. 1994. *Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Practice*. American Institute for Conservation. Accessed 15 July 2020. https://www.nps.gov/training/tel/Guides/HPS1022_AIC_Code_of_Ethics.pdf.
- AIC. 2018. *Member Designation Survey, Preliminary Report*. American Institute for Conservation. Accessed 20 September 2020. https://www.culturalheritage.org/docs/default-source/publications/reports/member-designation-survey-preliminary-reportb3996e46946d640d929bff0002fd16b.pdf?sfvrsn=c6f40a20_6.
- AIC. n.d. *Conservation Terminology*. American Institute for Conservation. Accessed 29 July 2020. <https://www.culturalheritage.org/about-conservation/what-is-conservation/definitions>.
- AICCM. 2002. "Code of Ethics and Code of Practice." Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material. Accessed: 17 July 2020. <https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CODE-OF-ETHICS-AND-CODE-OF-PRACTICE-Australian-Institute-for-Conservation-of-Cultural-Material.pdf>.
- Andrew Mellon Foundation. 2019. *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018*. Accessed 20 September 2020. https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/b1/21/b1211ce7-5478-4a06-92df-3c88fa472446/sr-mellon-report-art-museum-staff-demographic-survey-01282019.pdf.
- ARA and CILIP. 2015. *A Study of the UK information Workforce: Mapping the Library, Archives, Records, Information Management and Knowledge Management and Related Professions. Executive Summary*. Archives & Records Association, UK and Ireland (ARA) and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). Accessed 20 September 2020. <https://www.archives.org.uk/images/Workforce/20151124WorforceSurveyExecutiveSummaryA4WEB.pdf>.
- Ashley-Smith, J. 2017. "A Role for Bespoke Codes of Ethics." In *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Copenhagen Preprints*, edited by J. Bridgland, 1–8. Paris: ICOM. ICOM-CC Publications Online (icom-cc-publications-online.org).
- Auffret, S. 2019. "Considerations on the Preservation of the Authenticity of Cultural Heritage: A Conservator's Journey." In *ICOM-CC and ICOFOM 25th General*

- Conference Kyoto*, edited by F. Mairesse, and R. F. Peters, 17–23. Paris: ICOFOM.
- Autry, L. T. S., and M. Murawski. 2019. "Museums are Not Neutral: We are Stronger Together." *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 5 (2), Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://editions.lib.umn.edu/panorama/article/public-scholarship/museums-are-not-neutral/>.
- Autry, L. T. S. n.d. "Museums Are Not Neutral." Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://artstuffmatters.wordpress.com/museums-are-not-neutral/>.
- Avrami, E. 2009. "Heritage, Values and Sustainability." In *Conservation Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, edited by A. Richmond, and A. Bracker, 177–182. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Avrami, E., R. Mason, and M. de la Torre. 2000. *Values and Heritage Conservation: Research Report*. Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute. Accessed 2 August 2020. https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/valuesrpt.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Qq16SBPVtylr5ksJqAnm6drj9qs-Edj_uKJhHY8OopQtOj_D_gxl2sW5Q.
- Balachandran, S. 2016. "Race, Diversity and Politics in Conservation: Our 21st Century Crisis." Accessed 11 May 2021. <http://resources.culturalheritage.org/conservators-converse/2016/05/25/race-diversity-and-politics-in-conservation-our-21st-century-crisis-sanchita-balachandran/>.
- Barassi, S. 2009. "Dreaming of a Universal Approach: Brandi's Theory of Restoration and the Conservation of Contemporary Art." Presented at the Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths, London, Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann. Accessed 3 June 2021. <http://www.icom-cc.org/54/document/dreaming-of-a-universal-approach-brandis-theory-of-restoration-and-the-conservation-of-contemporary-art/?id=777#.YLIMWS-ZN0s>.
- Barber, A. 2020. "Lying, Misleading and Dishonesty." *The Journal of Ethics* 24 (2): 141–164.
- Bartlett, C. 2008. "A Tearoom View of Mended Ceramics." In *Flickwerk: The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics*, 18–24. Ithaca, NY: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University and Münster: Museum für Lackkunst. Accessed 1 September 2020. http://annacolibri.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Flickwerk_The_Aesthetics_of_Mended_Japanese_Ceramics.pdf.
- BSI. 2019. *BS EN 15898:2019. Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Main General Terms and Definitions*. London: British Standards Institution.
- Buyts, S., and V. Oakley. 1993. *The Conservation and Restoration of Ceramics*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- CAC and CAPC. 2009. *Codes of Ethics and Guidance for Practice*. Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property and the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators. Accessed 27 July 2020. <http://www.alapointeconservation.com/documents/ecode.pdf>.
- Caple, C. 2009. "The Aims of Conservation." In *Conservation Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, edited by A. Richmond, and A. Bracker, 25–31. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Castriota, B. 2019. "Authenticity, Identity and Essentialism: Reframing Conservation Practice." In *ICOM-CC and ICOFOM 25th General Conference Kyoto*, edited by F. Mairesse, and R. F. Peters, 39–48. Paris: ICOFOM.
- Castriota, B. 2021. "Authenticity, Conservation and the Type-Token Distinction." *Studies in Conservation*. In press.
- Catlin-Legutko, C. 2016. *We Must Decolonize Our Museums*. Accessed 14 May 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyZAgG8-Xg>.
- Clavir, M. 2002. *Preserving What Is Valued: Museums, Conservation, and First Nations*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Das, S. 2021. "In Conversation with Subhadra Das." Paper presented at *Matters of Care Conference*, Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum, May 12.
- de la Torre, M. 2013. "Values and Heritage Conservation." *Heritage and Society* 6 (2): 155–166.
- Drago, A. 2011. "'I Feel Included': The Conservation in Focus Exhibition at the British Museum." *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 34 (1): 28–38.
- Durant, F. 2020. *Conservation Is Not Neutral (and Neither Are We)*. Icon Book and Paper Group. Accessed 18 June 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFKS12TYTEg&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3Os7E2SJSGogeMdVJS4hks_yRyQVmiO7lB8wRVCm28xRHnCk57dSSZ0XU.
- ECCO. 2003. *Professional Guidelines (II): Code of Ethics*. European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations. Accessed 11 May 2021. http://www.ecco-eu.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ECCO_professional_guidelines_II.pdf.
- Georgieva, D. 2018. "It's not Binary or Economic Accessibility to Cultural Heritage." *Annual Meeting of the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy*, Sofia, 51(1): 67–81.
- Harris, J. 2021. "How a Broken Painting Captured Jackie Robinson's Unbreakable Spirit." Accessed 28 April 2021. <https://www.latimes.com/sports/dodgers/story/2021-04-16/jackie-robinson-painting-negro-leagues-museum-mlb>.
- Henderson, J. 2020. "Beyond Lifetimes: Who Do We Exclude When We Keep Things for the Future?" *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 43 (3): 1–18.
- Henderson, J., and T. Nakamoto. 2016. "Dialogue in Conservation Decision-Making." *Studies in Conservation* 61: 67–78.
- Hölling, H. B. 2017a. "The Technique of Conservation: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice." *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40 (2): 87–96.
- Hölling, H. B. 2017b. "Time and Conservation." In *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Copenhagen Preprints*, edited by J. Bridgland, 1–7. Paris: ICOM-CC. ICOM-CC Publications Online (icom-cc-publications-online.org).
- ICOMOS. 1994. "Nara Document on Authenticity", 46–48. Rome: International Council on Monuments and Sites. Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf>.
- ICON. 2014. *The Institute of Conservation's Code of Conduct*. Institute of Conservation. https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_code_of_conduct.pdf.
- Ishibashi, K. 2004. "Status of Historic Seismology in Japan." *Annals of Geophysics* 47 (2-3): 339–368.
- Iten, C. 2008. "Ceramics Mended with Lacquer: Fundamental Aesthetic Principles, Techniques and Artistic Concepts." In *Flickwerk: The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics*, 18–24. Ithaca, NY: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University and Münster: Museum für Lackkunst. Accessed 1 September 2020. http://annacolibri.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Flickwerk_The_Aesthetics_of_Mended_Japanese_Ceramics.pdf.
- Jenson, R. 2004. "The Myth of the Neutral Professional." *Progressive Librarian* 24: 28–34. Accessed 7 September 2020. http://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL_Jnl/contents24.shtml.

- Jones, S. 2010. "Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves: Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity." *Journal of Material Culture* 15 (2): 181–203.
- Jones, S., and T. Yarrow. 2013. "Crafting Authenticity: An Ethnography of Conservation Practice." *Journal of Material Culture* 18 (1): 3–26.
- Keulemans, G. 2016. "The Geo-Cultural Conditions of Kintsugi." *The Journal of Modern Craft* 9 (1): 15–34.
- Kintsugisouke. 2009. When Mending Becomes an Art (Japanese Urushi Art). Accessed 11 May 2021 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3mZgs0vkDY&fbclid=IwAR2ukXMgcuSaB_n5sYn7nuVI28NmSx6wjpb2AZ4GYQ-8dTU4I1vtWnfPHc.
- Mairesse, F., and R. F. Peters. 2019. "Introduction: What Is the Essence of Conservation?" In: *Proceedings from the ICOM-CC and ICOFOM 25th General Conference Kyoto*, edited by F. Mairesse and R. F. Peters, 7–13. Paris: ICOFOM.
- Malkogeorou, P. 2002. "The Observed Object: The Distance Between the Studio and the Gallery." *V&A Conservation Journal*, 41. Accessed 3 June 2021. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-41/the-observed-object-the-distance-between-the-studio-and-the-gallery/>.
- Meskel, L. 2002. "Negative Heritage and Past Mastering in Archaeology." *Anthropological Quarterly* 75 (3): 557–574.
- Msezane, S. 2017. "Living Sculptures that Stand for History's Truths." Accessed 20 September 2020. https://www.ted.com/talks/sethembile_msezane_living_sculptures_that_stand_for_history_s_truths.
- Muñoz-Viñas, S. 2002. "Contemporary Theory of Conservation." *Studies in Conservation* 47: 25–34.
- Muñoz-Viñas, S. 2011. *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Nilsson, L. 2018. "Mio Heki: Kintsugi Artist and Urushi Master." Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://kyotojournal.org/creative-kyoto/mio-heki-kintsugi-artist-and-urushi-master/>.
- Phillips, D. 1997. *Exhibiting Authenticity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pye, E. 2006. "Authenticity Challenged? The 'Plastic House' at Çatalhöyük." *Public Archaeology* 5 (4): 237–251.
- Rijksmuseum. n.d. "Operation Night Watch to start at the Rijksmuseum." Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/operation-night-watch-to-start-at-the-rijksmuseum>.
- Scott, D. 2015. "Conservation and Authenticity: Interactions and Enquiries." *Studies in Conservation* 60: 291–305.
- Spaarschuh, C., and H. Moltubaak Kempton. 2020. "Acting on Behalf of Objects? Conservators' Reflections on Their Professional Role." *Studies in Conservation* 65: 358–374.
- Squassina, A. 2021. "Time as a Key-Issue in Preservation." *Studies in Conservation*. In press.
- Stiem, T. 2018. "Statue Wars: What Should We Do with Troublesome Monuments?" Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/sep/26/statue-wars-what-should-we-do-with-troublesome-monuments>.
- Sully, D., and I. P. Cardoso. 2014. "Painting Hinemihī by Numbers: Peoples-Based Conservation and the Paint Analysis of Hinemihī's Carvings." *Studies in Conservation* 59: 180–193.
- Taylor, J., and M. Cassar. 2008. "Representation and Interpretation: the Symbiotic Relationship of Conservation and Value." *Studies in Conservation* 53: 7–1.
- UNESCO. 2009. "Hoi An Protocols For Best Conservation Practice in Asia: Professional Guidelines for Assuring and Preserving the Authenticity for Heritage Sites in the Context of the Culture of Asia". UNESCO. Accessed 4 August 2020 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000182617>.
- UNESCO. 2019. "Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention." Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>.
- Villers, C. 2004. "Post Minimal Intervention." *The Conservator* 28 (1): 3–10.
- Wain, A., and A. Sherring. 2020. "Changeability, Variability, and Malleability: Sharing Perspectives on the Role of Change in Time-Based Art and Utilitarian Machinery Conservation." *Studies in Conservation*, doi:10.1080/00393630.2020.1860672.
- Weiss, T. 2020. "Talia Weiss IIC 2020 Poster Video." Accessed 11 May 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IionH1MaKY>.