Revolving Documents

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Narrations of Beginnings, Recent Methods and Cross-Mappings of Performance Art

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Performance Conservation: A Condition Report, or a Para-Ethnography in Three Acts

In this experimental chapter, three members of the research team (fig. 1) Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge (funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, 2020–2024) set out to perform a condition report that considers performance and performance-based art (later abbreviated to performance). A condition report is a central document in conservation practice that details the condition of an artifact at a given time, supplemented by photographs and symbolic mappings, so that any changes in its material state are documented.[1] But the condition report meant here concerns the very concept of performance and performance conservation. We ask: What would it mean to understand performance through the lens of conservation? And how, in its manifold (after)lives, does performance resist classifications along with the standard curatorial and conservation procedures? Merging critical sensibilities with different tactics and methods in an experimental conservation-conversation

1 Condition reports, if performed systematically (e.g. before and after transportation, exhibition and loan), document successive changes that occur in an artwork over time, such as natural aging of materials, damage from accidents, vandalism, pest infestation, improper storage conditions or handling, and alterations resulting from restoration treatments.

Fig. 1. PCMK team during the colloquium *Performance Conservation: Artists Speak* at Bern Academy of the Arts (HKB), May 16, 2023. Photograph: Aga Wielocha.

that does not adhere to the conventions of academic discourse, we dissect, from our individual perspectives, and map into this chapter, both performance and performance conservation as inherently mutable concepts. Responding to a set of questions that formally guide our writing process, we argue for the necessity of close looking, and sensing, when faced with questions about the performance's continuing life. Importantly, midway through the project,[2] we are less concerned with delivering ready answers, but rather with pursuing a certain form of para-ethnography, in which collaborations are forged between distinct actors and expertise. We are keen, moreover, on expanding discussions we have held amongst ourselves and with the project's guests since its beginning. This is, by default, also an extension of an invitation to the reader to think with us and ultimately enter our conversation.

Hanna, how can performance be grasped through the lens of conservation and what consequences might this understanding of performance have for its continuing life?

2 The first draft of this essay dates from September 2022.

To conceive of a project addressing performance conservation as in our SNSF Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge, one has to first and foremost ask a question: What is performance? Unsurprisingly, this question also lies at the heart of conservation procedures, whose imperative demands that one understands what is subjected to the acts of interpretation and care. Appearing in a myriad of forms, performance refuses generalizations. In my research, I have chosen neither to argue for the performance's disappearance nor for its persistence in a certain form. Rather, I have investigated performance from the point of view of both the event and its rich material trace history, including its forms of memorialization and archive. My method has combined performance studies perspectives with art history and archival, memory, conservation and heritage studies. In my view, performance has become a phenomenon that inheres in objects—relics, props, and paraphernalia—just as it does in the embodied live actions. Moreover, my work on performance has led me to recognize that the varying forms of documentation, whether photographic or filmic, written narratives, oral accounts/storytelling and memory all constitute the work of performance in its durational, unfolding character (Emilie Magnin elaborates on this topic below). What was once described as the performance's viral ontology[3] came down on me as a radiant multiverse of forms and means whose presence is impossible to overlook.

You have written extensively about the notions of time that are embedded, often hidden and unexamined, in the discipline and history of conservation. How does performance help us to reconceptualize what time means within conservation?

The critics of the performance's persistent remaining seem to be unconcerned with a broader perspective on time. To cling to a moment in which the performance's action takes place not only relegates it to the inactive, absent past, but also restricts our

3 Christopher Bedford, "The Viral Ontology of Performance," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History,* ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Chicago: Intellect, 2012), p. 78.

understanding of time to a mechanistic conception of temporality. In such conception one moment is followed by the next, as represented by a clock time designed, in industrialized societies, to regiment life and dictate the rhythm of labor. Alternatives to this conception that confirm time's heterotemporal dimension can be found both in the history of Western philosophy and in indigenous conceptions of time (see, for instance, the Aboriginal concept of cyclicality and the human's embeddedness in time). Henri Bergson's *durée*, for instance, introduces us to a concept of time in which the past and the present that has been coexist, and in which the past preserves itself endlessly within itself, while the present passes. Duration occurs as a survival of the past, something that Bergson names "an ever-accumulating ontological memory" that is ceaselessly and automatically preserved. Importantly, in duration, the current moment does not depose that which came before.

Duration would allow us to conceive of the performance's presence, its being in the here and now, as a survival of the past and a gesture into the future. Each event of performance preserves the previous versions and anticipates those yet to be materialized. Performance conceived durationally unfolds on a time spectrum on which the event might still be seen as significant, but not necessarily central, on the larger spatio-temporal sitemap of performance. Rather than "disappearing, evanescent originals" impossible to be "kept" by notation, documentation, film/video recording or reconstruction—as famously stated by Richard Schechner[4]—the performance's power to remain is constituted by a swarm of entities perpetually reconstituting and reorganizing themselves. These are scores and notations (whether primary or secondary), documents and documentations, oral accounts, tacit and articulated knowledge and memories (including bodily memory), recordings on various media, and, finally, objects–relics, props and paraphernalia. Performing an ongoing act of exchanging energy and matter, these elements introduce their own heterotemporal character to the

4 Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 50, quoted in Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," in Jones and Healthfield, *Perform, Repeat, Record*, pp. 137–150.

mix, either by succumbing to wear and tear and entropy (props being used), by manipulating time (documentaries and recordings), or by fracturing the perceived flow of time as in the case of a live event. The event, then, appears on the temporal spectrum as durational but not necessarily different from an object—a more condensed and stretched manifestation of matter. In other words, both event and object are manifestations of the relative duration of the impermanent.

In this light, the model of artistic authority exerting a creative act in the creation of the "original event" needs to be reconsidered, along with the Western ideation of creation, in which an artist-maker imposes a form on a passive lump of matter. Following the anthropologist Tim Ingold, we ought to attend to "the material flows and currents of sensory awareness within which both ideas and things reciprocally take shape."[5] If the creative act and/or the event of performance are just two of the many temporal interventions within the matter-energy constellation, neither of them fully finalize or stabilize the materials and means of performance. Following Ingold, it is helpful to visualize the trajectory of performance as a meshwork with countless open nodes and loose ends. In its own way, such a meshwork leaves behind time's linear progression from a single point of creation, or from a performed event, which, as I believe, perpetuates a limited understanding of time.[6] If we visualize the work of performance, its durational working, as a meshwork spanning a large temporal scale, then the event, objects and relics, paraphernalia and documentation, oral narratives, knowledge and memory become loose, open-ended nodes. Sites of vital force and lively power; these nodes are points of arrival and departure for creative strands and acts.

The lens of conservation enables us to understand performance as never "one thing" only, but always already plural, heterogeneous and incipient. If this seems paradoxical, it is because the very idea of "performance conservation" has been associated

5 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), p. 10. 6 Hanna B. Hölling, "Time and Conservation," in *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints,* Copenhagen, ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 4–8 September 2017).

with attempts to re-enact, re-perform, or activate the original, live event. But if the urge to recall the imagined reality of the event could be put aside, a closer exploration of the archives of conservation—including the arcane and the behind-the-scenes forms of knowledge—reveal a rich life of leftovers, documents, recordings, memories and narratives. It is a burgeoning, unfolding work performing itself in and as these constituent parts, awaiting a discursive acknowledgement.

If performance manifests in a variety of forms, let us reverse this question and ask, What is conservation, and what might it become when concerned with performance?

Performance, as "a creature of its context,"[7] forces us to reconsider what conservation is and what it does. To be sure, performance is not the only result of cultural practice that does this. Rather, performance makes readily apparent that conservation is, and has been, a reorientational and reorganizational practice, one that changes what and how we see. When interrogating performance as a "conservation object"—a theoretical term indicating an entanglement of the object with the conservation's practice and discourse—we enter a relationship with a lineage of active agencies that render us, rather than observers, active makers of a work of art.

To preserve a work of art, any work of art, is neither to preserve the artistic intention nor to attempt to re-enact the creative act. Instead, to preserve a work is to preserve *the conditions of possibility* of a work, while being mindful of the values that come with it. To care for a work means at least to the same extent to care for the community and people that gave rise to it and sustain it. In that sense, conservation has the potential to contribute to the discourses of care, repair and healing that reach beyond the horizon of a meaningful treatment of objects.

7 For artwork as a creature of its context, see Alva Noë in Hanna B. Hölling, "Conserving Ourselves, Creating Ourselves: Thinking with the Philosopher Alva Noë," Writings—Performance: Conservation, Materiality Knowledge (December 2021), https://performance-conservationmaterialityknowledge.com/2021/12/21/alva-noe/ (accessed September 21, 2023).

You said that the dominant paradigm of traditional conservation has been the "object of conservation." How can performance help us rethink the object of conservation?

Conservation has developed a long tradition of mending and repair of physical stuff such as statues, pictures, murals and chairs. So, naturally the "object" has stood in the center of conservation efforts. Historians of conservation might also see the object of scientific analysis and material studies that, in the late nineteenth century, helped to shift restoration from the status of artisanship to a quasi-exact science. In the conservation theories of the twentieth century formulated by humanities scholars inside and outside the profession, we observe the beginning of a shift away from object-centrism. Today, in its plurality, diversity and sociality, conservation is understood as both a discourse and a socio-technological practice engaged with temporal and relational matter. As an epistemic and knowledge-building activity, conservation positions the "object of conservation" as an "epistemic object," a result of material and technological practices that generate and assure continuity.[8] So, how can performance help us to rethink, and to expand, the conception of this object? In a rewarding exchange with the scholar of performance studies, Rebecca Schneider,[9] I restated performance as "an object of conservation" with the view to situate performance in a long tradition of objects that have been conserved, without necessarily implying an objectual or material status of performance, or what Schneider elsewhere names the performance detritus[10]—an amassment of matter which consists not only of the carefully safeguarded fragment but also of the

8 On this topic, see my research project "Conservation and Contingency: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice" at Max Planck Institute for the History of Knowledge in Berlin, 2015; and Hanna B. Hölling, "The Technique of Conservation: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation,* special issue *The Future of Conservation*, 40, no. 2 (2017), pp. 87–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/19455224.2017.1322114 (accessed September 21, 2023). 9 Rebecca Schneider and Hanna B. Hölling, "Not, Yet: When our Art is in our Hands: Rebecca Schneider with Antiphonal Interludes by Hanna B. Hölling," in *Performance: The Ethics and the Politics of Conservation and Care*, Vol. 1, ed. H. B. Hölling, J. P. Feldman and E. Magnin (London: Routledge, 2023). 10 Rebecca Schneider, "Slough Media," in *Remain*, ed. Ioana B. Jucan, Jussi Parikka, and Rebecca Schneider (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), p. 68.

unintended deposit, sediment, or rubble. If an object, following Schneider, coheres or repeats on different time scales, I would like to think of an object as a slow performance, and performance as a quickly happening object that coheres and decays at different rates of resolution/dissolution. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's division between spatial (e.g. painting) and temporal art (e.g. music)[11] is once more put under pressure: spatial art has similar qualities to temporal art, and might be viewed as slow rather than fast. Such a temporal understanding allows us to differentiate change in artworks, and identify the work's active and passive response to time. Artworks actively involved with time such as performance and events (but also media installations) experience faster change; slower artworks such as painting and sculpture respond to time passively, which becomes reflected in the gradual yet consistent degradation, decay and aging of their physical materials. Objects and actions appear, again and again, as modulation and condensation of matter that radiates/moves at varying pace.

Emilie, your research explores how performances—living, shifting, contingent events—are translated into the security and stability of documentation. Some museums have even developed new, innovative documentation forms and protocols in order to make performance "make sense" within their systems. But is there something contradictory about wrestling the instability of performance into the familiar, reliable, and static form of documents? Are there ways of conserving, reclaiming, or recreating this instability from within documentation procedures?

It is true that every artifact or artwork entering a museum collection prompts a multitude of institutional practices that aim at "stabilizing" the new museum object, and that materialize in documents. The production of this documentation typically begins during the acquisition process, when an artwork enters its collection life, and continues to happen at specific moments of

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

the artwork's institutional lifetime, such as during loans and exhibitions, or during research analysis and restoration treatments. In the field of contemporary art conservation, the importance of the documentation process is even greater than for traditional artworks such as paintings: because many artworks—such as time-based media art and installations—must be installed, displayed, or performed in various ways in order to materialize, conservators need to document how they should be installed and experienced, and how they can change and behave between different iterations. As a result, documentation plays a central role in the conservation of contemporary art, supporting the perpetuation of knowledge about the work and, therefore, the ability to activate it in the future, in the absence of the artist. Of course, whether what constitutes the artwork is a set of material objects to be assembled, media files to be played back, or actions to be performed by living bodies, the way all these constituents are described and documented by the museum plays a defining role in how the work will be shown and remembered over time.

Over the last two decades, museums have started to acquire live performance works together with the rights to re-perform them. Consequently, conservation professionals have had to face the specific challenges posed by live art in the museum, and to adapt their conservation practices, since, as you mentioned, making performance-based works "fit" into documents and workflows that are better suited to physical objects is not always successful nor desirable. Therefore, several research projects recently attempted to rethink the practices of collecting, documenting and preserving performance-based art in institutions.[12] A common understanding of these projects is to consider performance-based art as a collectible and conservable art form, and to recognize

12 Amongst them are Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge (Bern Academy of the Arts, 2021–2024); Precarious Movements: Choreography and the Museum (University of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria, Tate, Art Gallery of New South Wales and Monash University Museum of Art, 2021–2024); Collecting the Ephemeral: Prerequisites and Possibilities for Making Performance Art Last (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, 2019–2023); Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum (Tate, 2018–2021); Documentation and Conservation of Performance (Tate, 2016–2021); Collecting the Performative (Tate Modern, Maastricht University and the Van Abbemuseum, 2012–2014).

the importance of both documentation and activation as complementary preservation strategies. Documentation approaches stemming from these projects include strategies already implemented in other fields of contemporary art conservation—especially time-based media—such as artist interviews, audiovisual documentation, identity and iteration reports,[13] and adapt strategies from adjacent fields such as ethnography, video game studies, theatre and dance studies that are better suited to account for interactivity and audience/participant experience. These research projects also enhance the need for collaborative and multi-perspective approaches for collecting and documenting ephemeral art forms.[14]

The aforementioned initiatives have already prompted many changes and paradigm shifts in collection institutions over the last ten years. In this sense, "unruly objects"[15] such as performances are certainly acting as a catalyst for institutional change, because they challenge and question existing structures, and because their versatility requires a large variety of untraditional skills from the collection caretakers. If we consider some of these changes more concretely, particularly in documentation methods and formats, I believe they do provide new leads for preserving, recreating, or at least acknowledging performance's inherent instability in museum procedures.

13 For a detailed description of the identity and iteration reports model, see Joanna Phillips, "Reporting iterations: a documentation model for time-based media art," in *Revista de História da Arte: Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art*, ed. Almeida L. Matos, Rita Macedo and Gunnar Heydenreich (Lisbon: Instituto de Historia da Arte, 2015), pp. 168–179. This model, which has been adopted by several institutions, follows the concept of allographic works (borrowed from philosopher Nelson Goodman) that has been widely implemented in conservation, describing installations and time-based media artworks in two stages: (1) the score / instructions and (2) its subsequent manifestations. See Pip Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations," *Tate Papers* 6 (2006). 14 See for instance Pip Laurenson and Vivian van Saaze, "Collecting Performance-Based Art: New Challenges and Shifting Perspectives," in *Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters*, ed. Outi Remes, Laura MacCulloch and Marika Leino (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 27–41. 15 Sociologist Fernando Dominguez Rubio distinguishes between "docile" and "unruly" objects to define, on the one hand, stable objects such as paintings, whose stable behavior is in concordance with museum policies and practice, in opposition to artworks which tend, on the other hand, to destabilize the usual regime of the museum. Fernando Domínguez Rubio, "Preserving the Unpreservable: Docile and Unruly Objects at MoMA," *Theory and Society* 43, no. 6 (2014), pp. 617–645, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-014-9233-4 (accessed September 21, 2023).

For instance, many conservators engaging with performance works underline how the collaborative process of documentation, the very fact of being present and engaging with the artists and performers during preparatory phases matters just as much as the final document. Obtaining a finalized documentation is no longer seen as the ultimate goal of the process, on the contrary it is becoming an exercise of transmission, knowledge sharing and embodied experience with the work and the network of people that make it happen. The extensive research conducted by Tate on Tony Conrad's performance work *Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain* (1972) as part of the research project Reshaping the Collectible clearly illustrated that. It showed that, if the "transmission dossier"[16] Tate created was successful in facilitating the transmission of the work, Tate also has to sustain the "communities of practice" (including past performers, museum staff members) that will know how to use this dossier and engage in collaborative transmission processes for future activations.[17]

Another consequence of thinking of documentation as an ongoing and collaborative process rather than a finished set of papers, is that documents themselves are becoming less "static" objects. Not only are the iteration or activation related reports meant to be regularly expanded and revisited, but recently some museums (such as SFMOMA or the HEK – Haus der Elektronischen Künste Basel) have started to use Wiki formats[18] to create collaborative and evolutive artworks documentation. Because Wiki-based platforms allow to track changes and can host various medias, the format is especially suited for digital art, but is also well applicable to performance. Wiki-based platforms can also be shared between different institutions and open pathways to

16 The dossier is a shared and editable object folder holding various forms of documentation (such as installation instructions, condition reports, images, emails). See Louise Lawson, Hélia Marçal and Ana Ribeiro, "Experimenting with Transmission," in *Reshaping the Collectible: Tony Conrad*, Tate Research Publication, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible/tony-conrad-experimenting-transmission (accessed November 2, 2022). 17 Lawson, Marçal and Ribeiro, "Experimenting with Transmission." 18 See for instance Martina Haidvogl and Layna White, "Reimagining the Object Record: SFMOMA's MediaWiki," *Stedelijk Studies Journal* 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.54533/StedStud.vol010.art08 (accessed September 21, 2023).

co-acquisitions and co-conservation efforts, even though, to my knowledge, to this day we still lack good examples in practice.

On another level, the way we perceive artworks (and their documentation) through all of our senses is currently gaining greater attention, which is of particular importance to the field of performance art. Time-based media conservator Amy Brost, for example, has challenged the largely visual-oriented bias of documentation methods and emphasized the importance of better documenting the sonic aspects of artworks.[19] In a similar vein, performance scholar Heike Roms's current research project, *An Aural History of Performance Art*,[20] focuses on the largely unexplored aural dimension of performance documentation, and how these documents can offer a different understanding of performance art. In the future, these methods will perhaps extend more broadly to all senses, and, despite the difficulty of recording experiences of smell, taste or touch, we can try to imagine what a multi-sensory documentation of performance could be, as well as its potential to reveal forgotten aspects of performances, and to create a more diverse array of documents.

So performance and other experimental art forms are changing conservators' responsibilities. Do they also change conservators' identities?

Thanks to the work of several conservation scholars that have underlined the situatedness and co-creative role of conservation, contemporary art conservators are becoming conscious of the identity-shaping role they are playing in the artworks they document.[21] This recent scholarship invites conservators to reflect transparently on their own role in producing and interpreting knowledge about artworks, and to distinguish between

19 Amy Brost, "A Documentation Framework for Sound in Time-Based Media Installation Art," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 60, no. 2–3 (2021), pp. 210–224, https://doi.org/10.1080/01971360.2021.1919372 (accessed September 21, 2023). 20 Heike Roms, "Listening to the Histories of Performance Art," in *Reconstructing Performance: Art Practices of Historicisation, Documentation and Representation*, ed. Tancredi Gusman (London: Routledge, 2023), pp.134–152. 21 See Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Sanneke Stigter, "Autoethnography as a New Approach in Conservation," in *Studies*

"objective truths" and "value-based judgements" in conservation documentation.[22] As a consequence, striving for a more diverse and inclusive representation of voices (both within and outside the museum) will also lead to a richer spectrum of documents and possible interpretations.

Many conservators are now well aware that there is only so much that documentation can record about a performance, and that it cannot either replace or truly account for the shared experiences that unfold during live performances, rehearsals or learning moments. But acknowledging the multitude of possible documentation formats, and documentarians, aiming for multi-perspective and multi-sensorial representation of performance can contribute to at least suggesting its richness and its evolving nature. Even incomplete, this plurality of documents can help to reactivate memories, and inspire new ideas.

Jules, through your work on the concept of the ritual, you argue that there is much to be learned from the study of ritual and ritual studies for performance conservation. What can we learn?

One of the most crucial tools that ritual offers the study of performance art is a reframing of its time scales and a recontextualizing of performance practices from a mere sliver of avant-garde history to a much broader and deeper presence in human culture. Even today, accounts of performance art tend to emphasize its newness. There are some important exceptions to this,[23] but in general, performance is seen to emerge in the late 1950s—or at the very earliest, around Dada in the second decade of the twentieth century. Furthermore, some of the earliest and most influential theoretical reckonings of performance

in Conservation 61 (2016), pp. 227–232; Hélia Marçal and Rita Macedo, "The aim of documentation: micro-decisions in the documentation of performance-based artworks," in *Preprints of the ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference*, ed. J. Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2017); Brian Castriota, "Object Trouble: Constructing and Performing Artwork Identity in the Museum," *ArtMatters: International Journal for Technical Art History*, special issue no. 1 (March 2021), pp. 12–22. 22 Castriota, "Object Trouble," p. 18. 23 For example, Fluxus co-founder George Maciunas's expansive conception of intermedia art (1960s–1970s) traces the roots of his own group's avant-garde practices not only through Dada and Futurism but also medieval processions and "multimedia spectacles" at the court of Versailles.

art—Peggy Phelan and RoseLee Goldberg in the United States, Elisabeth Jappe in Western Europe—emphasized performance as a fragile, fleeting medium, in contrast to painting and sculpture, which were seen as much older and much more enduring. Yet the study of ritual reminds us not only that performance is as old as humanity itself—maybe even older![24]—but also that it can attain astounding longevity. Even stone and bronze eventually age, decay, and fall apart. Yet gestures, dances, songs, and other movements that rely on seemingly delicate human bodies can be endlessly revived through generational renewal. In this way, ritual practices can outlive the temples in which they were first enacted. Ritual reconfigures the possibilities of performance conservation by establishing that performance is not nearly as frail—nor as new—as we might assume.

Which methodologies of ritual transmission (or perpetuation) could be adapted for the conservation of performance art? And how might such adaptation of ritual methodologies to performance conservation—or perhaps even to the conservation of contemporary art in general—look?

When contemporary people perform with the costumes or ritual items of their ancestors, they are not necessarily performing precisely the same gestures or singing the same songs. Integral to the notion of intangible cultural heritage is the potential for change and adaptation. While conservation has traditionally been concerned with arresting change—keeping artworks as stable and static as possible—change is not only compatible with the continuation of performance, but may even be a necessary condition of it.

24 The studies of early "ethologists" (researchers of animal behavior) such as Julian Huxley sought the origins of ritual in the practices of other animals. Huxley's celebrated 1914 study, *The Courtship Habits of the Great Crested Grebe*, demonstrated that grebes, freshwater diving birds, engage in performative behaviors that represent a formalization, abstraction, and elaboration of normal, more obviously practical behaviors. This phenomenon is known as "ritualization." If we concede that ritualization occurs among non-human animals, then it follows that the origins of ritual predate human beings. Ritual is therefore not only a culturally, but perhaps even a biologically-embedded practice.

If we understand conservation as a creative act, then historical performances are conserved through the renewals of other artists. Marina Abramović is the best-known exponent of "reperformance," but there are many other artists who work productively in this vein.[25] In Julie Tolentino's ongoing project *THE SKY REMAINS THE SAME*, she turns her own body into an "archive" for other artists' works. Here in Switzerland, Davide-Christelle Sanvee has reinhabited—and thus reinterpreted—the recent history of Swiss performance art.[26] While it might be impossible to resurrect the "original" performance, the ideas, gestures, and spirit of one performance might still be invoked by another. Here, we encounter performance *as* conservation.

If museums' efforts to collect and conserve performance art represent a relatively new phenomenon, Western institutions have been collecting ritual-related objects for a long time—in a manner that is more and more criticized. How could the new discipline of performance conservation and the recent rethinking of collecting and conserving rituals inform and learn from each other?

Some of this work is already taking place. Museums that hold items from indigenous cultures have in the past few decades learned to collaborate with the communities to whom these items belong spiritually, if not legally. This may mean facilitating loans from the museum to communities that wish to use their items in ceremonies and dances. In those cases, the potential physical damage to the objects is balanced not only against the community's right to use them, but also the fundamental purpose and meaning of the objects. Costumes, for example, are made to be worn; denying them that capacity might protect their materiality, but it impoverishes their performativity.[27]

25 For a wide variety of examples, see Amelia Jones, "Timeline of Ideas: Live Art in (Art) History, A Primarily European–US-Based Trajectory of Debates and Exhibitions Relating to Performance Documentation and Re-Enactments," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. A. Jones and A. Heathfield (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), pp. 425–432. 26 Jules Pelta Feldman, "'Sag was!,'" *Republik*, July 13, 2022, https://www.republik.ch/2022/07/13/sag-was (accessed November 13, 2022). 27 See for example Marian A. Kaminitz and Robert Kentta, "First Person Voice: Native Communities and Conservation Consultations at the National Museum of the American Indian," in *ICOM Committee for Conservation:*

Within conservation, the handling of museum objects has traditionally been restricted, and their active use has been seen as absolutely incompatible with the values of preservation. But when such items are worn and used by the descendants of the people who made them, this *is* conservation.

Crucial contributions to this paradigm shift have been made by museum workers who belong to indigenous communities, such as Rangi Te Kanawa, a conservator at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Collaborations between conservators and indigenous individuals are also in debt to the work of Miriam Clavir, who has argued that Western-trained conservators' typical focus on maintaining the physical integrity of objects might eclipse attention to crucial aspects of their conceptual integrity.[28] Clavir calls on conservators to "preserve the cultural significance"—not only the physical substance—"of material heritage under their care," since "it is due to this significance that the material is being preserved."[29] This work is also inspired by discourses around the fraught but fruitful category of intangible cultural heritage, which was adopted by UNESCO in 2003 to address the myriad forms of culture—music, dance, oral history, craftsmanship techniques, ritual, and much more—that relate to performance.[30] William S. Logan has described ICH as "heritage that is embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects."[31] Accordingly, ICH approaches

14th Triennial Meeting The Hague 12–16 September 2005, ed. Isabelle Verger, vol. 1 (London: James & James, 2005), pp. 96–102. The role of embodied performance in conserving fashion is the subject of this author's article: Jules Pelta Feldman, "Kim Kardashian x Marilyn Monroe: Fashion Conservation by Means of Performance," *Studies in Conservation* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2023.2260628. 28 Miriam Clavir, *Preserving What Is Valued* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002). 29 Miriam Clavir, "Conservation and Cultural Significance," in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, ed. A. Richmond and A. Bracker (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), p. 145. 30 *Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Paris: Living Heritage Culture Sector UNESCO, 2018). ICH, a successor to UNESCO's earlier category of "folklore," has drawn criticism from scholars engaged with performance for its internal contradictions, its blindspots, and its potential for calcifying what are meant to be dynamic practices. See for example Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds., *Intangible Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2009); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production," *Museum International* 66, no. 1–4 (2014), pp. 163–174; Diana Taylor, "Saving the 'Live'? Re-Performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage," *Études Anglaises* 69, no. 2 (2016), pp. 149–161. 31 William S. Logan, "Closing Pandora's Box: Human Rights Conundrums in Cultural Heritage Protection," in *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, ed.

prioritize the living transmission of culture within its origin communities, rather than the post-facto attempt by outsiders to preserve its products.[32]

Jules, you have recently introduced the idea of simulation as a form of extended conservation. Could you tell us what potential this idea bears for the field?

My research into simulation emerged from the observation that performance conservation can often be found where one least expects it. I noticed certain reverberations of performance art manifested in popular culture—television, cinema, video games—and realized that they might represent a form of simulation, by which I mean the dynamic modeling of a system. I see simulation as a response to criticisms both of traditional documentation—which lacks the movement and immersion of live performance—and of reperformance, which some see as a forgery that gives viewers the false impression of having experienced the original. A well-executed simulation, I believe, might offer contemporary viewers immersive access, preserving elements of surprise and contingency without compromising its own status as a simulation, i.e., without superseding its source material.

My primary object of investigation here is the work of Pippin Barr, who is Associate Professor in the Department of Design and Computation Arts at Concordia University in Montreal. He also designs witty, satirical computer games that use old-school aesthetics to comment on contemporary culture. I am interested in the seeming absurdity of trying to capture the personal, intimate, ineffable, and very *live* experience of performance with such reduced means. In 2011, shortly after Marina Abramović's landmark exhibition *The Artist is Present* closed at The Museum

Helaine Silverman and D. Fairchild Ruggles (New York: Springer, 2007), p. 33. 32 Recognizing this may necessitate more than "allowing" indigenous communities to access their heritage; sometimes, the best way to preserve indigenous cultural practices is by repatriating them back to those communities. Such repatriation also acknowledges the techniques of transmission that have conserved rituals and other forms of performance since before the inception of the modern Western museum.

of Modern Art in New York, Barr released a game with simple, 8-bit-style graphics, also called *The Artist is Present*.[33]

During the exhibition, Abramović sat silent and still in a chair, offering unbroken eye contact to any museum visitor who sat in the single chair opposite her. Many people who experienced this work found it intensely moving. But in his game simulation of this piece, Barr correctly identified that what most would-be participants chiefly experienced—and what official documentation tends to ignore—was a long wait in line. I have played Barr's game dozens of times, and my avatar has never managed to sit with the digital Abramović. The game is dreadfully boring; after entering the museum and buying a ticket, all you can do is stand in a schematically-rendered MoMA, with pixelated masterpieces on the walls, and wait for the line to move forward—at which point you may hopefully inch your avatar along. But if your attention has wandered to another browser tab and you don't move up in time, the non-player characters in line behind you will kick you out of it.

By focusing on real aspects of the performance experience, and summoning real emotions of anticipation, exasperation, and boredom, Barr's game, for its almost laughable reductiveness, still functionally simulates certain aspects of Abramović's work. It gives the viewer—or player—access to a certain contingency that was central to many viewers' experience of Abramović's piece, and its severe simplicity forecloses any possibility that one could mistake the game for the real thing. This research demonstrates the potential of simulation as a form of performance conservation, especially in light of criticisms of traditional documentation and of reperformance, but it also suggests the value of approaching performance conservation with an open mind. You never know where you might find it.

33 You can play Barr's *The Artist is Present*—exclusively during MoMA's 2010 opening hours—at https://pippinbarr.com/the-artist-is-present/info/ (accessed September 21, 2023).