

# Introduction

## Caring for performance

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

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

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

DOI: 10.4324/9781003309987-1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### What is called caring?<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

### **Continuing performance**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Theorizing performance

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

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

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

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

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

### **Musealizing performance**

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

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

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

### Conservation of performance as conservation of contemporary art

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

### Mapping the field: Chapter by chapter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

- 1 “Performance-based arts” (Ger. “Aufführungskünste”) was propagated in the context of a German Research Foundation research project led by Barbara Büscher and Franz Anton Cramer. For these scholars, performance-based art transcends disciplines and genres and focuses on interfaces “where performance appears as configurations and constellations of [various] arts.” See Barbara Büscher and Franz Anton Cramer, “From Work to the Performance: Reflections on Performance Art in the Museums,” *VDR Beiträge* 2 (2017): 93; “Collecting as Artistic and Documentary Practice: Towards a Fluid Access to Artefacts of/in Performance,” *Collecting and Conserving Performance Art*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, June 10, 2016, video of lecture, [www.restauratoren.de/collecting-and-conserving-performance-art-videos](http://www.restauratoren.de/collecting-and-conserving-performance-art-videos).
- 2 *Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge* is a four-year collaborative research project led by Hanna B. Hölling (principal investigator) in collaboration with Jules Pelta Feldman (postdoctoral fellow), Emilie Magnin (doctoral candidate), Joanna Leśniewska (artistic collaborator), Valerian Maly (associated artistic collaborator), Electra D’Emilio (project assistant) and Charles Wrapner (project assistant).
- 3 In addition to the writers whose essays are collected here, these have included Marina Abramović, Marilyn Arsem, Philip Auslander, Gabi Berlinger, Claire Bishop, Amy Brost, Barbara Büscher, Rivka Eisner, Florian Feigl, Thomas Gartmann, Kate

- Hennessy, Sabine Himmelsbach, Amelia Jones, Sarah Kenderdine, Sooyoung Leam, Esa Nickle, Alva Noë, Florian Reichert, Heike Roms, Michaela Schäuble, and the team behind the research project *Collecting the Ephemeral: Prerequisites and Possibilities for Making Performance Art Last*, led by Wolfgang Brückle and Rachel Mader.
- 4 Several important projects have paved the ground for our thinking about the conservation of performance: *Inside Movement Knowledge* (Netherlands Media Art Institute, 2009–10); *archiv performativ: Ein Modellkonzept für die Dokumentation und Aktualisierung von Performancekunst* (Zurich University of the Arts, 2010–12); *Collecting the Performative with The Live List* (Tate, Van Abbemuseum, Maastricht University, 2012–14); *Documentation and Conservation of Performance* (Tate, 2016–21); *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in a Museum* (2018–21).
  - 5 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 107. See Chapter 1 by Pip Laurenson and Chapter 3 by Hélia Marçal in this volume; see also Hanna B. Hölling, “Introduction: Object—Event—Performance,” in *Object—Event—Performance: Art, Materiality and Continuity since the 1960s*, ed. Hanna B. Hölling (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2022), 1–39.
  - 6 Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015).
  - 7 Noë, *Strange Tools*. The situatedness of knowledge is prominent in Donna Haraway and feminist materialisms.
  - 8 The question is inspired by Bernard Stiegler, “What is Called Caring: Beyond the Anthropocene,” translated by Daniel Ross, *Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, 21: 2–3 (2017), 386–404. Stiegler adapts the title of his essay from Martin Heidegger’s 1951–52 lecture course, *Was Heisst Denken* (“what is called thinking”).
  - 9 Before it acquired the meaning of tending to wounds and helping them heal, the word “care” was linked with Old English “caru,” meaning “sorrow, anxiety, grief, burdens of mind,” and in Old French with care for animals (feeding or grooming).
  - 10 See: Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London: Verso, 2020); Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Eva Feder Kittay, *Love’s Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Selma Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics*, trans. Liz Savage (London: Routledge, 1998); Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
  - 11 Stiegler, “What is Called Caring.”
  - 12 “Selling Point: Julia Pelta Feldman on Deaccessioning as Restitution,” *Artforum.com*, November 20, 2020, [www.artforum.com/slant/julia-pelta-feldman-on-deaccessioning-as-restitution-84506](http://www.artforum.com/slant/julia-pelta-feldman-on-deaccessioning-as-restitution-84506).
  - 13 Lens-based performance designates a work usually realized in front of a camera and presented later as a recording, such as in much work by Vito Acconci. Spectacle-based performance involves live beholders or participants.
  - 14 Amelia Jones, “Temporal Anxiety/‘Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” in *Archaeologies of Presence*, ed. Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks (London: Routledge, 2012), 197–221; Rebecca Schneider, “Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 58, no. 2 (2015): 14–32; Diana Taylor, “Saving the ‘Live’? Re-performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage,” *Études anglaises* 69, no. 2 (2016): 149–161.
  - 15 An important distinction has been made between reenactment and the historically informed reinterpretation of performance. For discussions of reenactment, see Robert Blackson, “Once More... with Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture,” *Art Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 28–40; Sven Lütticken, “An Arena in Which to Reenact,” in: *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary*

- Art, ed. Sven Lütticken (Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, 2005), 17–60; on reenactments in general, see Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2012); Martha Buskirk, Amelia Jones and Caroline A. Jones, “The Year in ‘Re-,’” *Artforum* 52, no. 4 (2013): 127–130; Cristina, Baldacci, Clio Nicastrò, and Arianna Sforzini, eds., *Over and Over and Over Again: Reenactment Strategies in Contemporary Arts and Theory* (Berlin: Institute for Contemporary Inquiry Berlin Press, 2022).
- 16 The acquisition of performances by MoMA, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Tate has brought about conversations regarding bodily learning and the transmission of knowledge in the form of accounts and experience. See, for instance, Athena Christa Holbrook, “Assembling the Body, Reactivating Presence: Collecting, Processing, and Conserving Performance at The Museum of Modern Art,” *Collecting and Conserving Performance Art*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, June 10, 2016, video of lecture, [www.restauratoren.de/collecting-and-conserving-performance-art-videos](http://www.restauratoren.de/collecting-and-conserving-performance-art-videos).
- 17 Hanna B. Hölling, “The Aesthetics of Change: On the Relative Durations of the Impermanent and Critical Thinking in Conservation,” in *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation*, ed. Erma Hermens and Frances Robertson (London: Archetype, 2016), 13–24.
- 18 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146. Less remarked upon, yet just as influential in performance discourses has been Phelan’s corollary insistence that performance’s disappearance guarantees its radical independence from the art market and other capital-driven machinations of the art system.
- 19 Amelia Jones, “‘Presence’ in Absentia;” Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation,” *Performing Arts Journal*, no. 84 (2006): 1–10.
- 20 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011).
- 21 Gabriella Giannachi, “Performance at Tate: The Scholarly and Museological Context,” *Tate Papers* 8 (2014).
- 22 Christopher Bedford, “The Viral Ontology of Performance,” in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (London: Routledge, 2012), 77–89. On a fruitful translation of Bedford’s argument into curatorial practice, see Judit Bodor, “The ‘Extended Life’ of Performance: Curating 1960s Multimedia Art in the Contemporary Museum,” in *The Explicit Material: Inquiries on the Intersection of Curatorial and Conservation Cultures*, ed. Hanna B. Hölling, Francesca Bewer and Katharina Ammann (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 117–41.
- 23 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 24 André Lepecki, “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances,” *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2010), 31.
- 25 Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.
- 26 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
- 27 Accounts of museums’ acquisitions of performance works detail institutions’ attempts to build new, more flexible practices and also the difficulties and resistances involved. See Teresa Calonje, ed., *Live Forever: Collecting Live Art* (Cologne: König, 2014); Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Megan Metcalf, “Making the Museum Dance: Simone Forti’s *Huddle* (1961) and Its Acquisition by the Museum of Modern Art,” *Dance Chronicle* 45, no. 1 (2022): 30–56. In this volume, see Goldie-Scot (Chapter 6) and Castriota & Walsh (Chapter 7).
- 28 See Vivian van Saaze, “In the Absence of Documentation: Remembering Tino Sehgal’s Constructed Situations,” in *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of*

- Contemporary Art*, ed. Lúcia Almeida Matos, Rita Macedo and Gunnar Heydenreich (Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte, 2013), 55–63; Pip Laurenson and Vivian van Saaze, “Collecting Performance-based Art: New Challenges and Shifting Perspectives,” in *Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters*, ed. Outi Remes, Laura Macculloch, and Marika Leino (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014), 27–41; and Pip Laurenson, “Tino Sehgal, This is Propaganda, 2002,” in *Inside Installations*, ed. Tatja Scholte and Paulien’t Hoen (Amsterdam: Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art / Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 2007), 35–42.
- 29 Performance works by Sehgal have been acquired not only by prominent museums like The Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Tate, Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal and the Stedelijk Museum, but also by private collections, including Switzerland’s Beyeler Foundation.
- 30 For a selection of resources concerning the conservation of contemporary art, see Miguel Angel Corzo, ed., *Mortality Immortality: The Legacy of 20th-Century Art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999); Ijsbrand Hummelen and Dionne Sillé, eds., *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (London: Archetype Books, 2006); Alison Lee Bracker and Alison Richmond, eds., *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009); Oscar Chiantore and Antonio Rava, *Conserving Contemporary Art: Issues, Methods, Materials, and Research* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013); for time-based media and media art, see: Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations,” *Tate Papers* 6 (2006); Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta G. Saba, Barbara Le Maître, and Vinzenz Hediger, eds., *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Pip Laurenson, “Old Media, New Media? Significant Difference and the Conservation of Software Based Art,” in *New Collecting: Exhibiting and Audiences after New Media Art*, ed. Beryl Graham (London: Routledge, 2014), 73–96; Hanna B. Hölling, *Paik’s Virtual Archive: Time, Change and Materiality in Media Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); for installation art: Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton, eds., *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Marina Pugliese and Barbara Ferrani, *Ephemeral Monuments: History and Conservation of Installation Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013); Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); for digital art: Annet Dekker, *Collecting and Conserving Net Art: Moving beyond Conventional Methods* (London: Routledge, 2018); and for kinetic art: Rachel Rivenc and Reinhart Bek, eds., *Keep it Moving? Conserving Kinetic Art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2018). This list is inexhaustive.
- 31 For an overview of the most important events in the field of contemporary art conservation, see Hélia Marçal, “Contemporary Art Conservation,” *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum*, Tate, 2019, [www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible/research-approach-conservation](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible/research-approach-conservation), accessed March 24, 2022.
- 32 For “freeze strategies,” see Ijsbrand Hummelen, Vivian van Saaze, and Matthijs Versteegh, “Towards a Symmetrical Approach in Conservation?,” in *ICOM-CC 15th Triennial Conference Preprints, 22–26 September 2008*, vol. 2, ed. Janet Bridgland (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2008), 1041–47. For “freeze frame paradigm,” see van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum*, 56–57, 129, 132, 139, 184. For freeze frame as locking the work in time, see Hölling, *Paik’s Virtual Archive*, 12.
- 33 The Variable Media Approach emphasized behavioral aspects of media and advanced media-independent thinking about the future lives of the artworks. By allowing media historically used by the artist to change over time, this facilitated the maintenance of works in collections through reinterpretation, migration, and emulation. Alain Depocas, Jon Ippolito and Caitlin Jones, “Permanence Through

- Change: The Variable Media Initiative,” 2003, [www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var\\_pub\\_index.html](http://www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pub_index.html), accessed January 12, 2022.
- 34 Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91.
  - 35 Renée van de Vall, Hanna Hölling, Tatja Scholte, and Sanneke Stigter, “Reflections on a Biographical Approach to Contemporary Art Conservation,” in *ICOM-CC 16<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference Preprints, Lisbon, 19–23 September 2011*, ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2011).
  - 36 Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss.”
  - 37 Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss.”
  - 38 Tina Fiske, “White Walls: Installations, Absence, Iteration and Difference,” in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, ed. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), 229–240.
  - 39 Hanna B. Hölling, “The Technique of Conservation: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice,” *Journal of the Institute of Conservation*, special issue The Future of Conservation 40, no. 2, (2017): 87–96.
  - 40 Hölling, “The Technique of Conservation;” Hölling, “Exhausting Conservation: Object, Event, Performance in Franz Erhard Walther’s Werkstücke,” in *Object—Event—Performance: Art, Materiality and Continuity since the 1960s*, ed. Hanna B. Hölling (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2022), 62–84; Hélia Marçal, “From Intangibility to Materiality and Back Again: Preserving Portuguese Performance Artworks from the 1970s” (PhD diss., Nova University Lisbon, 2018). The pan-European project *New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art (2016–19)* and the *Tate’s Reshaping the Collectible (2019–22)* were underpinned by social science perspectives putting emphasis on the creation of social environments in which humans and their structures exist in a relationship.
  - 41 Miriam Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued: Museum, Conservation and First Nations* (Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2002). A link between contemporary art and ethnographic collection was established by Renata Peters, “The Parallel Paths of Conservation of Contemporary Art and Indigenous Collections,” *Studies in Conservation* 61, no. 2 (2016): 183–7.
  - 42 Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2005). The grounds for the consideration of conservation as a web of actions and actors in a broader social field has been laid by van Saaze in *Installation Art and the Museum* and broadly discussed in the context of Dutch collaborative research projects such as *New Strategies for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (2009–13)* and *New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art (2016–20)* led by Renée van de Vall.
  - 43 van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum*, 185.
  - 44 Paul Eggert, *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture, and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 112. See also the chapter “Archival Activations and Creative Conservation,” in Hölling, *Paik’s Virtual Archive*, 158–60.
  - 45 For the invocation of the principles of reversibility or retreatability, see Cornelia Weyer, “Media Art and the Limits of Established Ethics of Restoration,” in *Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art: Reflections on the Roots and the Perspectives*, ed. Ursula Schädler-Saub and Angela Weyer (London: Archetype Books, 2010), 21–32.
  - 46 Following Paul Schimmel and Robert Wilmot, Anna Schäffler claims that, after the Second World War and in the aftermath of the Holocaust and atom bomb—which has become again a tangible threat following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022—the anachronistic preserver may see the former zeal to keep things intact for the future as an illusion. Anna Schäffler, *Die Kunst der Erhaltung: Anna Opermanns Ensembles, zeigenössische Restaurierung und Nachlasspraxis im Wandel* (Berlin: Edition Metzler, 2021), 319–20.



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