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Keywords

intervention; prevention; ethics; progress; drift; respect

1 'Confession, Morning Prayer', *Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928).

2 This article expands on three linked oral presentations given by the author in 2016 and 2017: 'Losing the Edge', Icon16 Conference, Birmingham, June 2016; 'What's So Ethical about Doing Nothing', 45th Annual Conference of the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), Chicago, May 2017; 'A Role for Bespoke Codes of Ethics', 18th ICOM-CC Triennial Conference, Copenhagen, September 2017.

3 For example, the 45th AIC Annual Conference *Treatment 2017: Innovation in Conservation and Collection Care*, highlighted conservation treatment, <https://www.conservation-us.org/annual-meeting/past-meetings/45th-annual-meeting-chicago>, and the forthcoming 44th Meeting of the Canadian Association for Conservation (CAC) will focus on 'hands-on conservation', <https://www.cac-accr.ca/conferences> (both accessed 16 November 2017).

4 Jonathan Ashley-Smith, 'Losing the Edge: The Risk of a Decline in Practical Conservation Skills', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 39, no. 2 (2016): 119–32.

5 'Terminology to Characterize the Conservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage', ICOM-CC, 2008, <http://www.icom-cc.org/242/about/terminology-forconservation/> (accessed 16 November 2017).

6 Janet Bridgland and Joan M. Reifsnnyder, *ICOM-CC Fifty Years 1967–2017* (Paris: ICOM-CC, 2017), 82.

'We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.' (*Book of Common Prayer*)¹

Introduction

What follows is a discussion that centres on the interventive treatment of objects and considers some of the ways in which ethical arguments are used to direct or deter such treatments.² As the quotation from the *Book of Common Prayer* suggests, it is not only intentional actions that can attract criticism; it may be just as bad to fail to act.

The proportion of time and effort dedicated to interventive conservation in heritage institutions appears to be decreasing. It is often preventive conservation and collections care activities that are displacing direct intervention, and this shift is often characterised as an inevitable part of the profession's progress. Arguments based on cost efficiency and risk reduction are sometimes employed as justification. Arguably, the situation is not straightforward and the ethical and economic arguments for doing less intervention are not always consistent or convincing. There has been a recent reaffirmation of the importance of treatment.³ However the underlying deficiencies in educational infrastructure and the current attitudes to heritage funding mean that the skills needed for intervention are still at risk.⁴ Moreover the expansion of preventive approaches into the curriculum and the workplace has a knock-on effect on the development and maintenance of skills. In this context there is a slow drift in the interpretation of ethical guidance, which leads to a conservative view of what can or should be achieved. This drift may be a sign of purposeful progress or it may merely result from aimless indifference. In either case it may be possible to manage the rate of change by encouraging individuals to express in detail their personal ethical beliefs, rather than relying on shifting interpretations of general ethical principles.

Doing something and doing nothing

In 2008 the Conservation Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CC) adopted a resolution that provided a terminology for the conservation of tangible cultural heritage.⁵ This clearly distinguished three types of measure: 'preventive conservation', 'remedial conservation' and 'restoration'. The three types of action were introduced in alphabetical order and the commentary on the resolution states that there was no intention 'to express a judgement on their relative importance or on the order in which they should take place'. The resolution and its commentary were republished, along with other policy papers, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of ICOM-CC at its 18th Triennial Conference in Copenhagen in 2017.⁶

"Remedial conservation" and "restoration" are both described as being actions directly applied to objects. They are distinguished by motive and by the state of the object before treatment. Remedial treatment is applied

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to unstable items whereas restoration can be applied to stable objects. “Preventive conservation” is defined as being indirect, carried out “within the context or on the surroundings of an item, or more often a group of items”. Preventive actions supposedly do not modify the appearance of the items. The assertion that preventive measures “do not interfere with the materials and structures of the items” is discussed below.

Broadly speaking, preventive conservation is indirect and may be applied to large numbers of objects simultaneously, e.g. through environmental control. Remedial and restoration treatments are direct and applied to single objects or small batches. Similar definitions for the different types of conservation actions can be found in the recently published British Standard *Conservation of Cultural Heritage—Conservation Process—Decision Making, Planning and Implementation*.⁷ It has also been suggested that the term ‘inhibitive conservation’, as proposed by Yvonne Shashoua, could be used as an alternative to ‘preventive conservation’. It is more honest about the ability of some measures to completely stop the processes of deterioration and possibly appears less hostile when contrasted with ‘interventive’ conservation.⁸ However, this phrase has not yet gained wide acceptance, so this article uses the ICOM-CC definitions.

Finally, within the context of a discussion about interventive treatment it should not be contentious to describe remedial treatment and restoration as ‘doing something’ and preventive conservation as ‘doing nothing’. While preventive conservators are busy and efficient, and not actually doing nothing, their actions are not aimed at doing something directly to the objects under their care. And as discussed below, the option of preventive measures is not the only motive for ‘doing nothing’. There is no overt conflict between prevention and intervention that forces anyone to take sides. However, as the two are arguably in competition for time and resources in both education and the workplace, this can lead to tensions.

Progress

The last 50 years have seen many changes in the way that conservation is carried out. There have been numerous developments in methods to measure and control environments and ways to protect objects on display and in transit. While not totally eliminating the need for remedial intervention, these developments reduce the frequency of treatments. New technologies offer new opportunities for ‘doing nothing’ directly to an object. Three-dimensional modelling and virtual restoration techniques mean that the fragile object need never be touched. Techniques such as 3D printing, computer numerical control (CNC) for cutting and shaping, the use of lasers to clean surfaces and to monitor the cleaning process, all reduce the need for intervention involving the direct use of hands, and hence reduce the requirement to develop hand skills. These new additions to the conservator’s arsenal require time to introduce and explain to the student and they further add to the number of possible activities of the employed conservator. However, it should be borne in mind that this vision of progress can be deceptive. The new technologies are not universally applicable or appropriate, and more importantly, are not universally available. Therefore traditional approaches will continue to be necessary in a great number of cases.

Progress is the name given to the process by which old attitudes and practices are replaced by newer ways of thinking and doing things. The usual understanding is that the word denotes ‘change for the better’. People who resist change are criticised for being ‘out of step’ and dubbed ‘luddites’ or ‘dinosaurs’. Progress can be seen as a combination of changes that are willingly accepted, and changes that are imposed by others. Survival in a changing world can be achieved by treating imposed change as an opportunity rather than a problem: *if you can’t beat them, join them*. Changes that were not really required are now seen as essential. Thus progress becomes inexorable, and worrying about a disappearing past becomes the mark of the ‘loser’.

⁷ British Standards Institute, BS EN 16853:2017, *Conservation of Cultural Heritage—Conservation Process—Decision Making, Planning and Implementation*, <https://standardsdevelopment.bsigroup.com/projects/2015-00157> (accessed 16 November 2017).

⁸ Yvonne Shashoua, ‘Conservation of Plastics: Is It Possible Today?’, in *Plastics: Looking at the Future and Learning from the Past: Papers from the Conference Held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London: 23–25 May 2007*, ed. Brenda Keneghan and Louise Egan (London: Archetype, 2008), 12–9.

⁹ See, for example, Frank Hassard, 'Continuing Professional Development and the Surrender of Culture to Technology in the Field of Heritage', in *15th Triennial Conference, New Delhi, 22–26 September 2008: Preprints*, ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: ICOM-CC, 2008), 95–101.

¹⁰ Cf. Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2005), 137.

¹¹ See, for example Miriam Clavir, 'The Social and Historic Construction of Professional Values in Conservation', *Studies in Conservation* 43 (1998): 1–8.

¹² Several conservators are quoted in this article, however they have not been identified. The quotations are all from informal interviews made by the author between May 2016 and June 2017.

¹³ See for example contributions to 'Conservation Matters—What Do You Think?', *Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material National Newsletter*, no. 117 (2011): 9–18, https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/NationalNewsletter_117_March2011_0.pdf (accessed 16 November 2017).

¹⁴ Personal communication with senior management at the UK's Institute of Conservation, 2015.

¹⁵ Cf. Cordelia Rogerson and Paul Garside, 'Increasing the Profile and Influence of Conservation—An Unexpected Benefit of Risk Assessments', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 1 (2017): 43; David Thurrowgood,

It is somewhat incongruous for conservators to connive in the abandonment of things that were once valued, such as practical skills. And it is incongruous for a conservator to think that progress cannot or should not be resisted, when the whole purpose of conservation is to reduce the pace of change, by preventing or reversing certain types of progress. Yet, as a developing profession, conservation welcomes and encourages progress and is enamoured of innovation at the cost of tradition. The search for novelty is at the heart of its conferences and publications. The notion of continuing professional development diminishes the value of being good at something through constant practice.⁹

There are parallels with the history of colonisation. The invading opportunists need to justify the domination, if not eradication, of earlier settlers. This is done by assuming that the current progressive situation owes nothing to the people who previously occupied the same space. In a story dominated by progress, historical distance is interpreted in terms of cultural superiority. The observation that the earlier occupants have never progressed, and seem indifferent to much of what the new settlers offer, is proof of their inferiority.¹⁰ Histories of conservation often start with the work of craftsmen and restorers and move on through the incorporation of scientific methodology and a growing sense of professional identity.¹¹ By analogy, the historic distance between now and the early days makes it easy to dismiss craftspeople and restorers as inferior and inconvenient aborigines—they reject the future offered to them. There is no reason to mourn their passing.

Progress has a twofold nature; part voluntary and part imposed. It should be possible to accept that progress is not a non-negotiable bundle that must be accepted in its totality. It can be negotiated to allow diverse communities to co-exist.

Intervention and prevention

Activities that involve intervention should not be in conflict with activities aimed at prevention. Prevention and intervention have similar long-term motives and should be able to live happily side-by-side. However, the author has visited large institutions dealing with science and industry where conservation and restoration are in separate departments, and large libraries where preservation and interventive conservation were the responsibility of distinct parts of the organisation. The relationships between the separate departments were often distant and occasionally antagonistic. One conservator recounted to the author that they were told that 'we are here to preserve the collections, not practical skills'.¹²

Preventive conservation is a growth area and interventive conservation is in decline. Evidence for this assertion can be found in several places. Senior conservators write that they have become less interventive.¹³ Current job advertisements for conservators demand an increasingly wide range of duties, which may or may not include practical treatment, but will always include elements of collections care. The number of applicants for accreditation with preventive conservation as a stated specialism is increasing.¹⁴ In some institutions staff numbers have been seriously reduced, leading to a refocussing of resources toward prevention which is deemed to be more strategic.¹⁵ In a context where right and wrong actions are determined by cost efficiency, prevention is seen as the most ethical behaviour.

Risk is also used as a determinant of ethical conduct. Exposing an object to greater risk seems at first sight to be a bad (unethical) thing to do. Preventive conservation aims to decrease risks to collections. Intervention automatically increases risk to individual objects, if only temporarily. But that is the nature of doing anything that has an obvious benefit. The place where risk is at its lowest is probably in a store. However, holding objects captive in the perfect store should not be the ultimate goal. In a working institution the store can be considered as a waiting room. Objects are waiting for opportunities to go on

display, to travel abroad, to be handled by scholars or schoolchildren. Many of these possible futures necessitate physical intervention. All of these opportunities increase risk. The risks can be controlled but never eliminated. If the purpose of a museum is not only to protect but also to promote heritage and make it accessible, then certain enhanced levels of risk cannot be deemed unethical.¹⁶

Returning to the cost argument, where misusing limited resources might be thought to be unethical, prevention is sometimes promoted as being more cost effective than intervention. At first sight 'doing nothing' has to be cheaper than 'doing something'. The economic argument for preventive measures appears compelling if you calculate cost per individual object. But using the waiting room analogy, you cannot actually compare the cost of sitting waiting with the cost of treating the patient, as they are very different things. If there were a convincing way of measuring the benefits arising from objects in different states, there would arguably be occasions when a cost-benefit comparison would favour intervention.

The argument that intervention is always more risky than prevention is readily believable because questionable interventions can become newsworthy, such as the controversy following the exhibition of cleaned paintings at the National Gallery¹⁷ or the debates over the restoration of the Sistine Chapel.¹⁸ Poor decisions about appropriate environments are not so headline-grabbing. However, because intervention generally deals with smaller numbers of items at a time, the total risk may not be so great. Moreover, change in value is one of the key components of risk estimation and intervention can potentially raise value, whereas the best that prevention can offer is to maintain value. Those who were involved in caring for cultural heritage in the mid-twentieth century assumed the inevitability of intervention, referring to preventive measures as actions applied once treatment is completed.¹⁹ Faced with the option of treating an object, the act of considering the risks of intervention may be sufficient to deter the conservator (such a stasis is described by the author elsewhere).²⁰

Of course, the risks associated with treating individual objects can be greatly decreased by ensuring the interventive practical skills of the conservator, through their initial training and later by supervised development. Above a certain level, specialisation is essential for the maintenance and development of these skills.²¹ Sadly, when cost management and mass-production methods take over the conservation decision-making process, remedial intervention can dramatically increase risk to large numbers of objects, such as in the mass de-acidification of books and the mass encapsulation of documents. In this case cost efficiency can be seen as unethical, as it promotes speed, the use of unskilled labour and an indiscriminating approach to collections.

Fashion is an agent of progress. Fashions for new materials for treatment, such as soluble nylon, have spread quickly and have arguably led to increased risk.²² However, fashions in environmental specification have also led to systems that increase rates of damage—the desire to use air-conditioning to stabilise humidity has, despite frequent reminders, neglected the effect of temperature in increasing rates of chemical reaction in organic materials.²³ Attempts to prevent mould growth in historic houses by raising the temperature have the potential side effect of decreasing the lifetimes of organic materials and increasing the risk of insect damage.²⁴

Furthermore, the idea of environmental control as being indirect is not quite correct. Even though hands may not directly touch the objects, when those hands move the controls of the air-conditioning plant they can alter the mass and dimensions of hygroscopic materials (furniture, paintings and textiles) in several galleries at once. And where attempts to modify environments involve large capital costs, the disruption of historic buildings, the consumption of energy and the use of fossil fuels, different ethical criteria must be introduced. The ethics of heritage preservation are then put in competition with the

contribution to 'Conservation Matters—What Do You Think?', 10.

¹⁶ Cf. *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, International Council of Museums (ICOM), 2004, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/code-of-ethics/> (accessed 16 November 2017).

¹⁷ The Burlington Magazine and the National Gallery Cleaning Controversy (1947–1963), <https://burlingtonindex.wordpress.com/2015/07/11/the-burlington-magazine-and-the-national-gallery-cleaning-controversy-1947-1963/> (accessed 16 November 2017).

¹⁸ The Sistine Chapel Restoration Controversy, <https://apecsec.org/sistine-chapel-restoration-controversy/> (accessed 27 November 2017).

¹⁹ Cf. Harold J. Plenderleith, *The Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art*. London (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 8.

²⁰ Ashley-Smith, 'Losing the Edge', 127–8.

²¹ For an opposing view on specialisation see Emily M. Williams, 'Cross-Disciplinary Conservation—Is This the Way Forward?', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 3 (2017): 201–11.

²² See, for example, Catherine Sease, 'The Case Against Using Soluble Nylon in Conservation Work', *Studies in Conservation* 26, no. 3 (1981): 102–10.

²³ Cf. Stefan Michalski, 'The Ideal Climate, Risk Management, the ASHRAE Chapter, Proofed Fluctuations, and Toward a Full Risk Analysis Model', *Contribution to the Experts' Roundtable on Sustainable Climate Management Strategies, held in April 2007, in Tenerife, Spain*, Getty Conservation Institute, http://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/science/climate/paper_michalski.pdf (accessed 16 November 2017).

24 Predictions based on damage functions as described in two online publications for the EU funded project *Climate for Culture*, <http://www.climateforculture.eu>: Jonathan Ashley-Smith, 'Report on Newly Gathered Knowledge on Damage Functions', 13–7, 28–30, https://www.climateforculture.eu/index.php?inhalt=download&file=pages/user/downloads/project_results/D_04.1_final_publish.pdf; and Jonathan Ashley-Smith, 'Report on Damage Functions in Relation to Climate Change and Microclimatic Response', 30–7, https://www.climateforculture.eu/index.php?inhalt=download&file=pages/user/downloads/project_results/D_04.2_final_publish.pdf (both accessed 27 November 2017).

25 AICCM Code of Ethics and Code of Practice, 2002, <https://aiccm.org.au/about/code-ethics-and-practice> (accessed 17 November 2017).

26 Don Etherington, 'Book Conservation and the Code of Ethics', *American Institute of Conservation Book and Paper Group Annual Volume Four 1985*, <http://cool.conervation-us.org/coolaic/sg/bpg/annual/v04/bp04-18.html> (accessed 16 November 2017).

27 See, Bernard Feilden, 'Preface', in *Conservation of Historic Buildings* (London: Architectural Press, 2003), vii; and François LeBlanc, *Field Trip Report, The Taj Mahal Conservation Collaborative Project—Experts Workshop*, 23–28 September 2002, http://ip51.icomos.org/~fleblanc/projects/2001-2007_GCI/field_trip_reports/2002-09-india-taj-mahal.pdf (accessed 16 November 2017).

28 Cf. Dennis Lee, 'Conservators and Copyright: What the Law and Judges Say', lecture given to the Institute of Conservation (Icon), London, 2017. Podcast available at <https://icon.org.uk/search/node/podcast> (accessed 16 November 2017).

29 See, for example, Günther Ortmann, 'On Drifting Rules and Standards', *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 26, no. 2 (2010): 204–14.

'ethics' of cost efficiency and global sustainability. Compromise often means that someone goes away from the discussion disappointed.

Respect

The Code of Ethics and Code of Practice of the Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) contains the entreaty that the attitudes of members towards cultural property are to be governed by 'informed respect' for 'its unique character and significance and the people or person who created it'. In the conservation of cultural property the actions of its members must be governed by 'an unswerving respect for the physical, historic, aesthetic and cultural integrity of the object'.²⁵

The demand for respect, whether unswerving or informed, is common to many codes of ethics and discussions of practice. The need for a more detailed interpretation of the word 'respect' in the light of acceptable conservation practice within a particular specialism was raised by book conservator Don Etherington as long ago as 1985.²⁶ The conservation architect Bernard Feilden claimed that unswerving respect was his guiding principle, yet of his involvement with the Taj Mahal he declared that the general rule that conservation should involve minimum intervention should not necessarily be the guiding principle in such a case, especially where later alterations had removed or changed elements that contributed to the harmony of the whole.²⁷

The request to respect a number of different attributes of an object, as well as the people who created it, is difficult to interpret as other than an ideal, something to be aimed for but never achieved. In reality, the conservator may often be forced to consider one attribute as being more important than another in a particular case. It may be necessary to create a hierarchy of attributes if a workable solution is to be found. At the moment there is no guidance on constructing, or selecting from, such a hierarchy. It has to be a matter of local or personal choice. Undifferentiated respect becomes even more difficult if the needs of present and future audiences are considered. And more difficult still if real world concerns about budgets and work priorities are included.

The choice of 'doing nothing' to an object rather than 'doing something' can sometimes challenge definitions of 'respect'. We must ask what is being respected if a real or virtual replica is created and the damaged or unreadable object is left untreated? If there is something that can be respected that is not a physical part of the original object, this legitimises ethical approaches where the intangible can take precedence over the material.

What is being respected if the object is never allowed out of the risk-free waiting room? Leaving damaged or unstable objects in store shows indifference to the potential of objects to educate and inspire present and future generations. This lack of concern might be considered unethical, and the argument of insufficient finances does not lessen the ethical obligation.

In the UK, original artistic works whose creator is alive or has been dead for less than 70 years are subject to copyright. If someone fails to rectify damage to such an object in their care the creator of the object may be able to take legal action against the infringement of their moral rights, which protect against derogatory treatment of copyright protected works.²⁸ Failure to do something can thus be seen as an unethical lack of respect.

Ethical drift

The word 'drift' is found in phrases such as policy drift, regulatory drift and ethical drift. Its use indicates processes whereby the intentions of policy-makers and law-makers are slowly reinterpreted and altered step by step, almost unnoticed, until present practice bears little relationship to original intent.²⁹ Where the individual steps are deliberate the reasons given to justify them often involve mention of a changing environment and changing frames of reference. Critics may also invoke individual human motives such as laziness

and greed. The slow almost imperceptible change may go unnoticed by the people busily engaged in the activity. There is often strong peer pressure to do as others do, so as not to disturb the flow. The notion of ethical drift was revived in 2015 by the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, in criticising the moral attitudes of the financial sector.³⁰ The phrase was also used by the current author in his 2016 presentation about the loss of practical skills at the UK's Institute of Conservation's (Icon) 2016 conference in Birmingham.

Conservation is undergoing both regulatory and ethical drift. The direction of the drift is towards a hands-off approach to conservation problems. In finance, the ethical drift among speculators and entrepreneurs usually results from attempts to push the boundaries imposed by regulation, or to deliberately cross them. In contrast, the drift in conservation appears to result from a desire to retreat from the boundaries that ethical codes suggest. Such caution has also been observed in some areas of financial regulation where guidance is given in the form of general principles rather than more detailed rules.³¹ However, the regulation of conservation, inasmuch as it deals with interventive treatment, is quite weak and is based almost exclusively on the interpretation of (deliberately) generic principles.

Arguably, the direction of the drift in conservation away from 'doing something' is dictated by external factors such as the tightening in heritage funding and the demands of higher education authorities. Among the internal factors is the perceived influence of some of the more vocal members of the profession who are likely to be academics who write books and papers, teachers, who have a largely captive and unformed audience, and members of committees and boards, who are generally the sorts of people looking to make a difference and make their mark.

The academic professionalisation of conservation has reinforced the perception that intellectual skills are more desirable and laudable than manual dexterity. Jean Brown has written about the effects of raising the academic status of conservation on the teaching of manual skills.³² Most conservation treatments demand both intellectual and manual skills in equal measure, yet if time is not allowed for the development of manual ability during early schooling and later in college, practical intervention tasks will not be carried out with the necessary speed and skill which may lead to mistakes and irreversible damage to artefacts. This is one mechanism that leads to a process of ethical drift where certain treatments are deemed unethical rather than just difficult, or as unsound rather than requiring skill and experience. The author believes that such a situation can arise quite quickly when experienced people become engaged in collections care activities or administration, or leave employment in circumstances where succession planning has not been possible. Thus any temporary inability to carry out certain types of treatment quickly becomes permanent. And since the treatments are no longer carried out, the need for specialised training disappears. This is compounded by the fact that it would be unethical for anyone to attempt the task if his or her skills have deteriorated from, say, too much paperwork. But of course the task itself is not unethical in the hands of someone with the appropriate skill and confidence. But if the skills are no longer taught, and people who retain them are not themselves retained, the task drifts by default into the category of being 'unethical'.

There is a concurrent trend in the wording of codes of conduct and ethics that avoid explicit guidance about practical intervention. The limits of intervention are blurred, yet conservators act as though they are following unequivocal and universally acknowledged guidelines. But conservators limit their options for treatment in order to stay within their own interpretation of the

³⁰ Mark Carney, 'The Age of Irresponsibility is Over', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/mark-carney/11666102/The-Age-of-Irresponsibility-is-over-Mark-Carneys-Mansion-House-speech-in-full.html> (accessed 16 November 2017).

³¹ See Julia Black, 'Forms and Paradoxes of Principles Based Regulation', LSE Law Society and Economy Working Papers No. 13/2008, Social Science Research Network (SSRN), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1267722> (accessed 16 November 2017).

³² A. Jean E. Brown, 'Conservation Now', *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 2 (2017): 133–51.

³³ Remark made by a conservator addressing a public meeting attended by the author, explaining why certain solutions suggested by the audience had not been adopted.

³⁴ See Icon's guidance on professional accreditation, <https://icon.org.uk/what-is-conservation/careers-training/professional-accreditation>.

³⁵ See, for example, Dean Sully, 'Conservation Theory and Practice: Materials, Values, and People in Heritage Conservation', in *International Handbook of Museum Studies Volume 2: Museum Practice*, ed. Conal McCarthy (Sydney: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 1–23; Glenn Wharton, 'Conserving the Kamehameha I Monument in Hawai'i: A Case Study in Public Conservation', in *13th Triennial Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 22–27 September 2002: Preprints*, ed. Roy Vontobel (London: Earthscan Ltd, 2002), 203–8; J. William Shank and Tim Drescher, 'Breaking the Rules: A New Life for Rescue Public Murals', *Studies in Conservation* 61, no. sup2. (2016): 203–7.

³⁶ For details of Icon's Dynamic Objects Network see <https://icon.org.uk/groups/dynamic-objects-network/scope> (accessed 16 November 2017).

guidance. Sensible elegant solutions to problems are deemed to be both sensible and elegant but 'not what a conservator would do'.³³

The current situation

The final sections of this article introduce a possible solution for the control of regulatory and ethical drift, but first it is necessary to look at the current situation in the profession. Or perhaps it would be better to look at the wider world of conservation activity. It is important to note that there are people who carry out work that might generally be thought of as conservation or restoration but who choose not to be part of the formal institutionalised profession. Restoration suffers quite badly from the effects of ethical drift because it is necessarily interventive and is disregarded by advocates of some ultrapure forms of conservation. However it is still incorporated in the ICOM-CC trinity of accepted actions, and the ICOM-CC's 2008 terminology deliberately retained the use of the term 'conservator-restorer' to describe those that practise under the general umbrella of conservation. It is also implicit in PACR, the Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers scheme within Icon.³⁴

There are groups of people who work within the profession but who do not always feel welcomed or properly catered for. They exhibit a number of similarities to some of those who practise on the outside. Many are conservators that work directly with individual objects, often working in the private sector and working for private clients. Some of these are probably happier working with traditional tools than hand-held spectrometers; some of them have told the author that they are made to feel uncomfortable or inferior by what they perceive as the science-led academic elites of the profession. They are guardians of practical skill and they need protection themselves. The argument here is that they need to be given an authorised voice that declares that what they do is justifiable and valuable.

There are several groups of conservators who openly claim that the published ethical guidance does not work for them or doesn't overtly condone what they believe is the best solution to a treatment problem. These are people who believe they are part of the conservation profession and want to remain so. People within these groups can only find generic ethical principles that were primarily designed to recognise and consolidate the unity of the profession, rather than celebrate the diversity among those who would be its members. These are dissatisfied conservators who should be encouraged to write their own ethical statements.

One such group consists of people who deal with outdoor monuments, whose care and treatment are often the concern of specific communities. These communities may be very localised or globally dispersed.³⁵ Other groups dissatisfied with current guidelines include those who work with objects that function mechanically, such as trains and boats and planes, clocks and watches, books, musical instruments. In 2017 in the UK, Icon set up a specialist network for dealing with such 'Dynamic Objects', in part motivated by the acknowledgement of their 'difficult fit' within current ethical frameworks for conservation.³⁶ There are also those involved in cultural heritage where factors such as traditional skill or artistic concept are more important than material continuity.³⁷ The argument here is that these different groups should be allowed to write specific codes of ethics that satisfy their specific needs. This is made clear by the fact that contemporary art can challenge traditional ethical thinking as seen, for example, in the project *Conceptual Toolkit for Contemporary Conservation*, set up Muriel Verbeeck from the University of Liège because 'traditional theories demonstrate their limits in the face of challenges posed by the new heritage objects'.³⁸ And Icon's recently formed Contemporary Art Network lists 'ethics in collecting, preservation, conservation and display' as a potential area for discussion.³⁹

Faced with this diversity, many conservation organisations still maintain that general principles offer sufficient guidance, and that anyone who interprets them wrongly could potentially be excluded.⁴⁰ Such a nebulous

threat may be sufficient to deter some people from joining in the first place, and for those already joined up, the lack of clarity behind the threat perhaps drives the drift towards 'doing nothing'.

An alternative approach

A new approach requires professional bodies to change their attitude to regulation, cease the threat of sanctions (very rarely enforced), and recognise that diversity and inclusion are better approaches. Professional bodies may claim that is what they do already, but arguably this is not clear, especially given that they continue to use hostile terms such as 'compliance' and 'enforcement'.⁴¹ Conservators, singly or as groups, should be encouraged to be individually accountable and be given a platform to declare and defend their practice. Individuals or groups should clearly state what their overall mission is, what their hierarchies of values are and what activities they currently practise.

The role of the conservation's professional bodies would be to ensure that there was an agreed set of instructions that would guide institutions, groups or individuals to create their own locally relevant detailed policies in a common format. The local policy would be what is followed after consulting an ethics checklist.⁴² The preliminary checklist is a way of making sure that the conservator has thought very carefully before deciding to do something, not deciding to do nothing. All of these local declarations would be collected and made available in one place. The only compliance required is that the authors demonstrate that they have thought about it and can justify their actions.

The obvious place to collect these policies and make them universally accessible is an internet site. The idea of using the internet as a place to collect and compare diverse conservation decisions is not new. Jonathan Kemp, writing in 2009, suggested using wiki's to record conservation proposals and treatment records as they developed. This would force people to be honest and open about their decision process.⁴³ Kemp's proposal deals with the historic record, the present proposal deals with future intentions. They both attempt to record current practice with the aim of guiding future actions.

The purpose of the current proposal of an open resource of diverse ethical statements is to broaden a conservator's understanding of what is possible when the necessary skills are available, and what is justifiably acceptable in a wide variety of different contexts. It is a way to offer new approaches that have not been considered or have been assumed to be unacceptable. If the conservator's mind is opened to a range of new possibilities this might stimulate new demands for relevant training. It might provoke new approaches to 'doing something' and prevent a slow drift into unquestioning inaction. At worst it will have ensured that people have thought about the ethical considerations that guide their practice and been obliged to justify them. And with luck it will give a platform for those who currently feel unfairly excluded from the mainstream profession.

The instruction manual

Encouraging multiple diverse ethical statements will not lead to anarchy and the breakdown of civilisation. The authors of each policy will want to be considered as part of the conservation movement and will want to adhere to a common mission. The instruction manual for the creation of bespoke policies would stipulate the inclusion of some words that make readers of the policy understand that they have 'come to the right place'. Something akin to this statement from Icon's Code of Conduct would suffice:

'To conserve cultural heritage so that it can continue to be used for education and enjoyment, as reliable evidence of the past and as a resource for future study.'⁴⁴

The chosen mission or value statement would represent the brand for that particular type of endeavour.

37 See, for example, Hirotsugu Saito, 'Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Japan' (presentation at the 2004 Workshop on Inventory-Making for Intangible Cultural Heritage Management, Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), Tokyo, 6–11 December 2004), http://www.accu.or.jp/ich/en/pdf/c2005subreg_Jpn2.pdf (accessed 16 November 2017).

38 Muriel Verbeeck, *A Conceptual Toolkit for Heritage Preservation*, online project resource, <https://www.researchgate.net/project/A-conceptual-toolkit-for-heritage-preservation> (accessed 16 November 2017).

39 For details of Icon's Contemporary Art Network, see <https://icon.org.uk/groups/contemporary-art-network/about-the-network> (accessed 16 November 2017).

40 For example, the most extreme course of action mentioned in the 2016 Icon complaints procedure is 'termination of all membership categories of the Institute', see <http://icon.org.uk/system/files/public/important-documents/complaints-procedure-2016-v1.pdf>. The AIC draft document on dealing with allegations of unethical conduct suggests 'Sanctions may include, but are not limited to, suspension or loss of Professional Associate or Fellow status'; see <http://www.conservation-us.org/docs/default-source/governance/policy-for-addressing-allegations-of-unethical-conduct.pdf?sfvrsn=2> (both accessed 30 November 2017).

41 See Jonathan Ashley-Smith, 'A Role for Bespoke Codes of Ethics', in *ICOM-CC 18th Triennial Conference Preprints, Copenhagen, 4–8 September 2017*, ed. Janet Bridgland (Paris: International Council of Museums, 2017), 1–8.

42 Cf. Alison Richmond, 'The Ethics Checklist—Ten Years On', *V&A Conservation Journal* 50 (2005), <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-50/the-ethics-checklist-ten-years-on/> (accessed 16 November 2017).

43 Jonathan Kemp, 'Practical Ethics v2.0', in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, ed. Alison Richmond and Alison Lee Bracker (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2009), 60–72.

44 Icon, *Code of Conduct*, Item 4.2.

⁴⁵ For example, on 31 October 2017, Icon's Heritage Science Group completed a month-long online survey canvassing views on the ethics of sampling.

The instruction manual would suggest ways in which the conservator(s) can declare individual tastes and preferences. There is a range of possible areas concerned with interventive treatment where either personal or institutional preference is possible: hierarchies of value, hierarchies of authenticities, minimum evidence for reconstruction, criteria for detectability of restoration, archiving of removed material, policy for sampling, and so on.⁴⁵ Elements of a preferred policy would be chosen from a range of accepted attitudes. For example, one group might declare that they specialise in restoration, and select one of the possible options from a range of criteria for detectability. Some of that group may think it important to repair using a distinct and different modern material for replacement, while others may prefer to use the same material as the original, wherever possible. Some might declare that they think maintenance of skill is as important as maintenance of original molecular structure. Some might think that a historic clock should actually tell the time, or that a historic book should open properly so that it can be read.

Variety does not mean that the central aim gets lost. Sandwich shops and coffee outlets do not offer a one-size-fits-all filled roll or cup of coffee. Customers are encouraged to design their own sandwich from a range of different breads and fillings. No one can walk into a famous-brand coffee shop and just ask for a cup of coffee. Customers are forced to exercise choice and declare what kind of coffee drinker they are. Do they prefer small, regular or large, black or white, hot or cold, hazelnut or raspberry flavoured. Variety of choice does not mean that the distinct identity of these businesses is lost.

Following the coffee shop analogy, the bespoke code is like a paper cup. The brand statement appears on every cup produced, the customer's name appears on just the one cup destined for them. The individual gets to select a favourite style of coffee and chooses whether or not to have chocolate sprinkles on top.

Conclusion

In conservation decision-making the option of 'doing nothing' to an object may be selected for several reasons. The choice may be driven by an unwillingness or inability to 'do something' or it may be the result of a conscious preference for preventive actions. Although preventive conservation is not in conflict with activities such as remedial treatment or restoration, it appears to the author that preventive conservation is on the increase at the expense of interventive treatment. Arguably this change in the use of resources is interpreted as progress that demonstrates the development of the profession. The change may be due to improved technologies that decrease the need for frequent treatments, but equally it may reflect budgetary constraints that restrict the amount of resources available.

Arguments based on cost efficiency and risk avoidance to support the shift toward the preventive approach are not clear cut and often avoid discussion of the limitations of those preventive measures. Consideration of the concept of 'respect' in existing ethical guidance can lead to interpretations that allow or encourage active intervention. Where budgetary constraints delay the recruitment or development of skilled specialists, the consequent lack of action may eventually lead to the idea that some treatments are unethical. There are several sectors of the conservation profession that have expressed dissatisfaction with current ethical guidance.

A system that allows for the development of local or 'bespoke' codes of ethics might solve the problem and encourage a more inclusive atmosphere. Ideally the local codes or policies would be in a common easily comparable format and made publicly available, and the collection and comparison of statements of personal ethical attitudes may be one way to maintain the diversity of the conservation community. It is also one approach to controlling the drift in the interpretation of ethical guidance that is often justified as inevitable progress.

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Abstract

This article discusses the ways in which ethical arguments are used to direct or deter interventive treatments. Preventive conservation now takes a greater proportion of conservators' time and this shift in employment opportunities is reflected in college curricula. Despite a recent reaffirmation of the importance of treatment, the underlying problems with educational infrastructure and heritage funding mean that practical skills are still at risk. In this context there is a slow drift in the interpretation of ethical guidance, which leads to a conservative view of what can or should be achieved. This drift may be a sign of purposeful progress or it may merely result from aimless indifference. In either case it may be possible to control the rate of change by altering attitudes to regulation and by encouraging individuals to express in detail their personal ethical beliefs rather than relying on shifting interpretations of general ethical principles.

Résumé

« L'éthique de ne rien faire »

Cet article aborde les façons dont les arguments éthiques sont utilisés pour diriger ou décourager les traitements interventionnistes. La conservation préventive prend maintenant une plus grande proportion du temps des restaurateurs et ce changement dans les opportunités d'emploi se reflète dans les programmes d'études universitaires. Malgré une réaffirmation récente de l'importance du traitement, les problèmes sous-jacents liés à l'infrastructure éducative et au financement du patrimoine montrent que les compétences pratiques sont toujours en danger. Dans ce contexte, il y a un changement lent dans l'interprétation de l'orientation déontologique, ce qui conduit à une vision conservatrice de ce qui peut ou doit être réalisé. Ce mouvement peut être le signe d'un progrès volontaire ou peut simplement résulter d'une indifférence sans but. Dans les deux cas, il est possible d'en contrôler le degré en modifiant les attitudes à l'égard de la réglementation et en encourageant les individus à exprimer précisément leurs croyances éthiques personnelles plutôt qu'à se fier à des interprétations changeantes des principes éthiques généraux.

Zusammenfassung

„Die Ethik des Nichtstuns“

In diesem Artikel wird der unterschiedliche Einsatz ethischer Argumente bei der Lenkung oder Ablehnung invasiver Methoden diskutiert. Präventive Konservierung nimmt einen immer größeren Teil der Zeit eines Restaurators in Anspruch und diese Verschiebung findet sich auch in den Curricula der Universitäten wieder. Obwohl es vor kurzem eine Bestätigung der Notwendigkeit praktischer Maßnahmen gegeben hat, bedeuten die zugrundeliegenden Probleme bei der Ausbildungsinfrastruktur und bei der Geldverteilung im Kulturbereich, dass praktische Fähigkeiten noch immer bedroht sind. Es findet in diesem Kontext eine langsame Verschiebung bei

der Interpretation ethischer Richtlinien statt, was zu einer konservativeren Ansicht dessen führt was erreicht werden kann oder erreicht werden sollte. Diese Verschiebung kann ein Zeichen eines zielgerichteten Fortschritts sein oder das Resultat einer ziellosen Indifferenz. In jedem Fall kann es möglich sein die Veränderung zu kontrollieren, wenn man Individuen dazu ermuntert, ihre persönlichen ethischen Grundsätze detailliert auszudrücken und sich nicht auf die unsteten Interpretationen genereller ethischer Prinzipien zu verlassen.

Resumen

“La ética de no hacer nada”

En este artículo se discute cómo se usan argumentos éticos para cambiar o impedir intervenciones. Hoy en día, los conservadores dedican la mayor parte de su tiempo realizando actividades de conservación preventiva y este cambio en las oportunidades de empleo se refleja en los planes de estudio de las universidades. A pesar de que recientemente se ha resaltado la importancia de los tratamientos, los problemas subyacentes de la infraestructura educativa y la financiación del patrimonio significan que las habilidades prácticas todavía están en riesgo. En este contexto, se observa una lenta tendencia hacia la interpretación de una orientación ética que conduce a una visión conservadora de lo que se puede o se debe lograr. Esta tendencia puede ser un signo de avance intencionado o puede ser el resultado de indiferencia sin objetivo. En cualquier caso, puede que sea posible controlar el ritmo de cambio alterando comportamientos normativos y alentando a las personas a expresar detalladamente sus creencias éticas personales en lugar de confiar en las interpretaciones cambiantes de los principios éticos generales.

摘要

“无为的道德规范”

本文探讨了用道德论据来指导或阻止干预性修复处理的方式。目前预防性保护的工作占用了修复师们较多的时间，而这种就业前景上的转变体现在了大学课程上。尽管近来修复处理的重要性得到了重申，但教育基础设施和遗产基金上的潜在问题意味着实操技能仍有风险。在这种情况下，人们在职业道德规范的解释上渐渐趋向了一种“什么能做或什么应该完成”的保守态度。这种趋势可能是果断进取的表现，也可能仅仅是毫无目的的漠不关心所致。无论以上哪种情况，我们都可以通过转变对规章的态度以及鼓励修复师详细表达自己的职业道德信念等方式来控制这种趋势变化的速度，而不是依赖于转变对一般职业道德准则的解释。

Biography

Jonathan Ashley-Smith studied chemistry to post-doctoral level. He joined the Victoria and Albert Museum as a scientist and conservation apprentice in 1973. Between 1977 and 2002 he was Head of the Conservation Department. In 1994 he was awarded a Leverhulme fellowship to study risk methodology which eventually led to the book *Risk Assessment for Object Conservation*, published in 1999. He left the V&A in 2004 and has since worked as a freelance teacher, research supervisor and consultant. He was a partner in the European project *Climate for Culture* 2009–2014. His current interests are risk and uncertainty in heritage decision-making.

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