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Temporality, Impermanence and the museum The ethics of conservation and the works of Anselm Kiefer

Virginia A Dressler

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Temporality, Impermanence and the museum

The ethics of conservation and the works of Anselm Kiefer

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Using some of the concepts from Heidegger’s 'The origin of a work of art' as a foundation, I will argue that every work is a unique and original entity, not capable of being simulated or repeated by artificial means. A work is bound by the temporal nature of its own material, as in all forms of matter. The product of restoration work is ultimately a copy of the original, destroying a work’s original essence of time, material and space. Museums often present works as absolutes within seemingly timeless walls of illusion. An environment of immortality is often conveyed, where age and death do not seem to exist or have any effect. The idea of an unchanging, immortal work is furthered by restoration work, where a work’s material surface is altered to extend life. Alternatively, preventative conservation retains authenticity of a work’s original material, space and point in time of creation whilst the environment and structure is stabilised. I will also argue for a limited lifespan inherent in every work, in keeping with the material intention of all matter.

Existing ethical codes set by national and international museum organizations are frequently weakly defined outlines of the major issues in conservation, and lack applicability. Attempts to create a set of universal guidelines, though, are likely to be ineffective, as conservation work is done on a case-by-case basis.

Three works by Anselm Kiefer will be examined in the extent of the conservation work and the resulting works. To conclude, a suggestion for displays and environments that recognize the finite quality of works, with some examples of existing institutions.
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Anselm Kiefer, Osiris and Isis, (1985-87), mixed media, 381 x 560.1 x 16.5 cm,

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Introduction

By a strictly physical sense, a work is an entity consisting of material, time and space, the product of a process of physical creation. At this fundamental level, a work subsists within the same physical world within which all matter exists, and in so, abides by the same temporal rules. A work also acts as a mute witness to its past, unable to object to any alterations to its essence. The term 'work' used here is indicative of a physical presence of a being, though in an artwork exist other, less concrete realms. These other states in an artwork are more abstract in nature, non-physical, illusional realms, seeming to transcend the temporal or material laws of the physical world. These other states represent something beyond the material surface, behaving much like symbols. The subjective nature of these non-tangible states does not provide the same finite restrictions of materiality of the physical state in works. For this argument however, I will primarily focus on the physical being, from creation to death, in the material surface and material restrictions of an artwork.\(^1\) The work will thus be considered strictly in each work's material qualities, as a being.

First of which to make note are some larger issues and terms used in this paper such as aesthetics, perception, truth, authenticity, value, etc., each problematic in its own usage and definition. In turn, at certain points

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\(^1\) I should make note that the term work in this paper specifically refers to material works in museums, to exclude “objectless” works like digital works, happenings, performance, environmental art, body art, etc. Also interesting are arguments such as George Monger ‘Conservation or Restoration’, *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 7 (1988), pp. 375-80 (p.376-7), which addresses the issue of visual purity in machines, trains and cars.
acknowledgements to some of these problems will be made, but not extensively due to the length of these arguments and the variety of definitions resultant from each.

I will explore the material nature of the individual work with the effects of conservation work and the resulting ethical implications. The difference of preventative and restorative conservation will be distinguished and existing codes of ethics will be examined. Many of the codes set by museum organisations extend to cover many facets of the museum, though a few sections in particular will be explored more in-depth than others. Preventative and restorative case studies of the conservation work carried out on selected works by Anselm Kiefer will be explored. Twentieth century works have been used mainly in this paper, though important to keep in mind is that all works can be essentialised to a basic material level.

The material, the idea and the museum

...the only truth is an individual truth, which needs to be carefully preserved. 

Every work maintains a unique, original and non-repeatable place in space and time, abiding by the same laws of continual time, nature and decay as all other matter. Every work is essentially a product of a physical process, an assemblage of particular material, a point of time, and the space occupied by the material. Within these elements subsist a work's essence. After the point of creation the work exists as a entity that is independent of the mind. Existence is a continual process, as a

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continual perceptual experience. Works situated in museums have long held an illusion of timelessness, seeming to exist in a higher realm outside the mortal world (one could say within the walls of the ivory tower), and in this context do not appear to follow the rules of material temporality. Eventually though, all works must accept their own temporal state of material, and the ensuing total deterioration, or material death. Artworks communicate through the visual image, lacking word and language, signifying the relevance is within the visual, material layer. The temporality of each work is in part of nature and time’s effect and the physical determination of each work.

According to Martin Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of a Work of Art’, an authentic work exists within the parameters of a ‘virtuous circle’ (Figure 1). Each work is an outcome of specific acts of consciousness, which results as physical material. The point of origin is the moment of creation, in the physical construction of material and the specific space occupied by the work, ‘from which and by which something is what it is and as it is’. After this point, the authentic work is, in turn, ‘compelled to follow the circle’. The boundaries of the circle physically constrain the work, sustaining the works’ true “thingness”. The completion of the circle is the material death of a work, unavoidable in spite of any illusion of permanence. The truth of being of a work is found in its “thingness”, the actuality of the material. A work’s essence is in part from physical constructs, from its moment of creation. The

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6 Ibid, p.144.
physical properties of every work precede the illusional, as the illusional is perceived through the material surface. Museum display and conservation work are usually more concerned with maintaining an illusion of a chosen immobile appearance than a work’s material existence.

Although this standpoint denies a common idea of an artwork maintaining a higher status outside time and materiality, the physical boundaries of the work’s material limitations are realised simultaneously here with its aesthetic impact without deception in the state of material truth. Some writers have claimed that ‘Origin of a Work of Art’ is a ‘rejection of the Western tradition of aesthetics and a retrieval of its forgotten sources’, so rather aesthetics have been temporarily put aside, first focusing on a work’s basic elements of existence. The basic commonalities of all matter and beings are found in origin, essence and death. Artworks are rarely subjected to this kind of material treatment or regard, though these irreducible, fundamental elements of time, material and space are the very elements which lead to the completion of each works’ material destruction. By this stance, the temporal limits of material can be realised, and in so, the limitations of being. The determination of the durability and longevity of material is possible in a more precise manner by science and technology than the other abstract realms of works.

If we consider the works in their untouched actuality and do not deceive ourselves, the result is that the works are as naturally present as are things. The picture hangs on the wall like a rifle or a hat. 

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The fundamental essentials of material, time and space of every work are the basic principles with which a work exists, and as such, the artwork is thus regarded as an object.

Truth and actuality exist within the work’s essence, in a work’s ‘thingness’. Restoration work tampers with the original essence, transforming the original qualities to create a new work. Alternative to restoration work is preventative conservation, which does not alter the work’s essence, but instead strives to balance environmental and structural problems of each work. At the minimal level of preventative conservation, works are stabilised against any possible decomposition or devaluing through the neutralisation or elimination of harmful elements in the immediate environment and storage areas. Preventative methods can prolong the life of a work in a way that still retains authenticity.9

Time and nature produce their own marks on the work in the course of the lifespan, and these marks are also indicative of Heidegger’s ‘thingness’ of a work, or Benjamin’s ‘aura’.10 The ‘thingness’ authenticates a work to its own existence, perhaps to remind the viewer and the work of its materiality and of its life. These marks are results of the experience and use of the work. A work’s ‘thingness’ involves physical changes through experiences of time.

World-withdrawal and world-decay can never be undone. The works are no longer the works they were.11

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9 This issue of authenticity will be explored later.
The work retains its ‘thingness’ by maintaining and preserving its specific place in
time, space and material (or in another more inclusive term, its essence), whilst also
displaying the consequences of time, activity and experience. In the course of the
circle, a work undergoes an indefinite number of authentic physical states over time,
though the authentic work is one that bears its essence and all of the authentic
physical changes of its being. The continual changes in existence signify a static
nature in viewing works over time.

The museum often does not display a work’s ‘thingness’, or every work’s
eventual material death. A perpetual myth of a work’s immortality and timelessness
is conveyed in the sterilised environment of the museum, and also through extensive
restoration on a work. In a way, time has been suspended in the museum, where
every effort has been made for time not to have any sort of physical effects like age
or decay. The illusion of suspended time in the museum also does not admit to
decay or age.

Some differentiations in some of the basic connotations of time should be
noted here, as in the point of creation, the apparent suspension of time by museums
in the display and environment, and finally nature’s non-stopping, unrelenting
destructive time. The changes of age and decay from continual time are absent in
museums. Chosen points in time often used in museum display are points of
historical time, which is ‘intermittent and variable’, while daily, on-going time
gives regularity while also deeming change. A point in time, space, and material is
present within each work, while concurrently experiencing continual time. The work

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is made to appear eternal in this listless state, though in fact no work can remain entirely inactive in time, material or state of being.

Without change there is no history; without regularity there is no time. Time and history are related as rule and variation. Time is the regular setting for the vagaries of history.¹³

Methods of display and art conservation have been likened to methods in science and medicine through the preservation of specimens. ‘The use of the vitrine in science and medicine is linked to the need to keep a specimen in a still viewable, arrested state of being’.¹⁴ Hints of taxidermy processes can be found in the museum; works are suspended in time through methods of pickling, dehydration and neutralisation in their respective sterilised environments. The arrested state of being, however, is another illusion, creating the appearance of a constant state and condition of being. Where museums have created illusions of timelessness and permanence, the actuality of life does not have definites in time, order or assurances of life or death, except for the assurance that time does not desist. Even within an arrested state, the constant experience of time will continue to create marks on a work.

The museum is an artificial environment, placing works under panes of glass and behind ropes. Yet no amount of distance or illusion can deny the impermanent quality of all material. The museum withdraws the work from its world, attempting to displace or conceal a work from time and being. The viewer is often physically distanced from the work, by barriers such as pedestals, ropes or glass, attempting to

avoid any contact to the physical realm of the work. In the voyeuristic distance between the work and the viewer, the truth or visual purity of the state of the material is continually transmitted in the perception of the work. The decaying, ever-changing mortal world does not typically enter into the white walls of the museum. The concealment of display, in the feeling of completeness and totality, is often present in the chronologically and stylistically arranged layouts of museums. The unconcealment occurs in visual truth, life, and material condition. The genuine experience of a work is in the work’s physicality, in the authentic condition of its material. The viewing event of a work is in the carefully placed stage set of the museum, with an interpretation applied to every work. Also often unseen in the museum environment, restoration work creates a surface of a visual lie, constructing another visual layer outside of the original circle.

The museum serves multiple social functions; educator, illustrator, displayer, purchaser, conserver, whilst belonging to everyone in theory, as a public servant. ‘Museums behave as ethical guardians as well as owners of collections’\(^{15}\) (my stress). The social assignment of cultural guardian provides access and education for the community to works, while maintaining and securing works. The access to works provided to the public attempts to include, ‘interpretation, education, exhibition, outreach, documentation, research, publication, both within and outside

the museum’. These functions of the museum require use of the works by activity and wear.

The museums’ role as guardian to works should also imply ethical behaviour and the display of authentic, unaltered works. These expectations of the role and duties of the museum are difficult ones to prioritise, in that which functions provide the most relevance or applicability. Perhaps this role cannot be completely fulfilled in every aspect, though in the least, the museum has been socially expected to uphold certain ethical and moral obligations in its actions, as outlined in brief in the codes of ethics. Prolonging the lifespan of a work is attained by methods of either preservation or restoration, though each type of conservation entails different extents to the workings. Perhaps the main moral obligation in museum practice should be the maintenance of material purity and truth in the visual surface of every work.

In theory, museums will gradually transform in accordance with the changes in values and needs of society. As well, changes in the material needs of works have demanded modification in the treatment and care of newer works in particular. The evolving nature and materials of art has necesitated different methods of handling and interpretation of works. In Anselm Kiefer’s case, interpretation is not provided by the artist, but is instead left to the viewer or museum to discern. As well, a work by Kiefer is not as materially sustainable as say, a marble sculpture.

‘Truth is the truth of Being.’\textsuperscript{17}

The work is a visual key for the viewer to the past, translated by contemporary interpretation and set in a particular context. A work is a piece of visual evidence, and if altered or falsified, will mislead as to its original essence. Through the authentic work, a piece of the past is hypothetically attained. Besides conservation efforts, works are also inhibited and controlled by the current context and interpretation. Works change in their significance and value through time, dependent on interpretations, context and society. The transformation of the natural, physical changes of a work, as well as numerous interpretations, constantly refreshes works. Context and interpretation may change in different environments or time periods, as all truths of society, though the only verifiable truth of a work is the truth found in the authentic material and state of visual honesty maintained by a work’s essence.

For a work to remain truthful to its own essence, certain moral and ethical principles, in addition to the physical ones previously mentioned, should be followed. The work that accurately presents its own current state of material, time and space discloses its true essence. The truth in, and of, being involves the ‘unconcealment’\textsuperscript{18} of the authentic qualities of the work’s essence through the original essence. Processes of restoration work alter the original material, time and/or space of the work, signifying a transformation into a new, separate being.

\textsuperscript{17} D Farrell Krell (2002), op.cit., p.206.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 176.
Science and technology have provided the illusion of exact chemical reproducibility, but have not yet admitted to the ethical implications of these alterations. The chemical make-up of paint or other material can be scientifically reproduced precisely at the basic chemical level, however the application of the reproduced material to the work is done within altered time and space. Ultimately, the original coordinates of material, time and space of the work are lost in the processes of restoration. Likewise, science cannot reproduce aesthetic elements by any technical means, only the subjective hand or mind of the artist can complete this work.

The difference of art and science should be drawn at this juncture. Science is based on reproducible and repeatable facts and theories. Its laws are definite and concrete, not functioning on feeling, intuition or delight. Actions of scientific work are taken after deliberation and analysis of previously proven theorems. Art, on the other hand, is non-rational. Artworks may be analysed by science, but cannot be formulated into its theorems. Though science has generally been regarded as more capable and less fallible than the arts, yet science also has its limitations and fallacies. Therefore, the application of science to art in conservation has shortcomings and false measures of reproducibility.

The development of technological innovations has prolonged the material lives of works and beings, by applying artificial materials and processes. Archival materials such as acid-free paper and acrylic cleaners promise longer sustainability of material. Preventative conservation utilises full use of such products, neutralising material and environment to offer prolonged lives. The replacements of original elements with artificial parts- much like the use of prosthetics- where a likening of
the original serves the purpose of use or similitude of the original. The artificial prolonging of life can be found in the use of respirators, kidney-dialysis, apparatus, heart-lung machines, pills, surgeries, genetic alterations, etc.

Aesthetic qualities of artwork extend beyond the elemental configuration of material, again a quality unable to be reduced in science. One attempt to summarise aesthetics was a 'subjective visual perception phenomena'. Issues of aesthetics are a complex set of human reactions to form, colour, surface texture, etc. Aesthetic qualities cannot be analysed or reproduced by scientific methods, for aesthetic values do not follow the logical laws of science. Attempts to recreate aesthetic values will never duplicate the original. At best, they offer a hint of the original work. As well, each individual could perceive the same work in a much different manner.

The activity and experience of a work, even within a displaced, listless state of a museum, have their effects; oil paints fade from their original colour, metal corrodes, Jean Tingley's *Homage to New York* blows up. Time and the effects of time do not desist, regardless of any impression presented in many museums. A work is existent in our physical world, undergoing innumerable 'authentic' physical states in the continual activity and experience of time. The condition of being transforms each work naturally, yet retains the essence outlined by the circle. The physicality of the work is what affords the experience.

Every work belongs to a particular era, experiencing periods of brilliance and also of obscurity. Works are constantly re-interpreted into different contexts,

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19 S R Jones, 'Science and Art of Picture Cleaning', *The Burlington Magazine*, p. 60.
deeming varying significance of each work. Truth is the unconcealment of beings as beings by its true state of being and condition. The transformation of a work in time in part is by use and utility. This transformation includes value, history and significance. An authentic work that sustains its lifespan, in its longevity, or brevity, is the most truthful to self, and to the viewer, in completion of its circle. The ‘happening’ of truth is in natural decay.

Preservation and Restoration

The last century in particular has introduced a range of new materials, stemming from advances in technology and science. Some of these newer materials are not as sustainable as the more traditional mediums of oil paints and marble.\textsuperscript{20} The durability and sustainability of these newer materials offer shorter, and often less predictable, life spans. Aside from the newer, mainly man-made materials, the use of materials with especially high rates of decomposition, such as newspaper, food items, plants, animals, etc., have become commonplace in twentieth century art practice.\textsuperscript{21} Reasons for this move in art to more temporal materials are numerous, whether for an artist’s own experimentation with alternative material, a lack of funds or, in other cases, the intentional use of temporal materials for a shortened life.

\textsuperscript{20} Also to note, some artists have also employed materials with higher sustainability as well.
\textsuperscript{21} In the artwork of artists such as Damien Hirst and Marc Quinn have used these materials or ideas of material temporality as essential features of their work; blood, live and dead animals, flowers, etc.
The rise of multi-media works have initiated issues concerning the different rates of aging within a single work, as in many of Anselm Kiefer’s works, creating conservation nightmares for their respective owners. Especially problematic in Kiefer’s work is the combined use of organic and non-organic materials. Organic materials have at times reacted adversely when used with other materials. The finished work in its total material elements exists as its own independent essence, despite the incongruity in the different rates of aging found in the various materials of the work. The total work ages and transforms within time and space, as do our bodies and all other forms of matter. Nature and time work as natural killers, an undeniable fact of existence.

Mixtures of pigments analysed in older oil paintings for example have incorporated organic elements such as ‘resins, dyes, insects, flowers, and leaves’. These pigments were often custom made per work, creating the issue of recreating a consistent chemical make-up. This produces an effect of different rates of decay for each mixture, or in the case of older oil paintings, of each colour. This difference of change affects the entire aesthetic surface, in that an untouched work will never appear exactly as it was. If the pigments of a work are reproduced and reapplied, this is at the state of an aged work, and not of the original, and therefore, the original essence will never be rediscovered.

‘The producer does not belong to the product’.23 Each work has a defined course of its own material intention, perhaps in due course overruling the intention of the artist or museum.24 The material intention can be found in the natural completion of every work’s circle. An artist is essentially a producer, creating an entity and providing life, or origin. Once a circle initiates its course though, the material requirements should supersede.

The profession of conservator and the emergence of conservation departments are relatively new to museums. The first full-time conservation lab was a preservation lab in Berlin in 1888, and then, later, a lab within the museum in the case of the British Museum in 1931. In the developments of the field and in science, the consequences of conservation work is weighed more so than previously, as well as the limitations of any conservation work acknowledged. Conservation work is carried out on a case-by-case basis, dependent on factors such as condition, value, time, money, staffing and urgency. Conservators first carry out condition reports on works, formulating long and short term plans for conservation work. A work is valued at this point not only in its physical condition, but also the social, historical and monetary significance.25

Works are interpreted in part by the contexts in which they are placed, and in so, significance and value are added by contemporary interpretations. The

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changing nature of a work extends through time, rising and falling in value. Time and history have created their own marks, much like a brush or a material substance, on the surface of the work. Time works as a natural destroyer, as in the state of living is indicative of deterioration. Ideally, each work has a running file of its condition, often updated at accession, before loaning or before display. At this point of interaction, a decision is then made regarding the worth of the conservation work in the relation to the work’s value weighing the time, efforts and monies required of the museum. After the state of condition is decided and a value assigned by conservators, an estimated life expectancy of a work can be predicted. In John Ashley Smith’s book, *Assessing Risk Management*, a break point in every work can be determined, where the minimum level of physical integrity is found. This is also about the same point defined by the Museums Association when the item can be deaccessioned or destroyed. A work that has fallen below its break point has lost its relevance and significance. Conservators have defined the level of integrity of a work to decrease through time, in the deterioration of material, as well as the value and/or historical and cultural significance. This integrity should also further extend to the visual obligation of maintaining the authentic essence of a work. Implementing all known methods of restoration could extend the life of a work to some degree, though the rate of decay will never cease. The decay and change of

28 Duchamp and other artists and writers have commented on a lifespan to works, often adding that museums are essentially mausoleums.
the work is not damage, but instead the on-going realisation of a work’s own
essence.

Conservators work within the social institution of the museum, fulfilling a
profession that is a curious blend of science and art. Conservators first fill the role
of scientist, assessing a work in its material condition. The European Confederation
of Conservator-Restorers’ Organisations (E.C.C.O.) define the profession of
Conservator-Restorer as ‘neither an artist nor a craftsperson’, but rather one who
preserves ‘cultural property’. The application of science to artwork has its
limitations in so far as sustaining material, time and space by technical means that
still retain a works’ essence without adding superfluous elements or by alterations.

Ashley-Smith also advocates an increased responsibility of conservation and
compiles a checklist (Figure 2), broad enough to relate to the individual work.
Variations in the results of conservation work occur on a regular basis, in
differences of operation, in the working guidelines of each museum, and in the
individual tastes, preferences and education of each conservator. When working
within the subjective realm of an artwork, personal taste and perception are relevant
factors. Recent trends in certain conservation departments include increased
documentation and the responsibility of ethical obligation in all workings of the
museum.

As the museum and its workers exist within the changing social constructs of
our particular culture and time, the methods and ethics of conservation are also

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29 E.C.C.O. guidelines, adopted by Council 11 June 1993,
modified through the years. Each institution in theory maintains and enforces its own working guidelines of conservation and ethics, though certain museums have referred primarily to the codes set by organizations such as International Council of Museums (ICOM), the Museums Association\textsuperscript{30}, E.C.C.O., etc. as general guides. The codes of ethics for museums and conservators used by museums at best scratch the surface of the major ethical dilemmas resulting from conservation work, particularly regarding the art of this last century. These codes are weakly defined outlines, and do not provide ample specifics to the extents of preventative or restorative conservation work, although the complexity of setting ethical guidelines to restoration work is important to note. Detailed codes would fail in their incapacity to address all conservation situations, but in the least the anticipation of technological advances should be handled earlier rather than later. As conservation work is done on a case-by-case basis, any attempt at a formulaic equation or a set of universal guidelines is ineffectual. Attempts at universal laws result in the loss of the individual nature of each work by applying generalised codes. Individuality cannot be categorised by broad, over-riding rules. Each work must fulfil the individual truth of its essence. This dilemma of individuality has created differences in the ideologies of every conservation department in devising a shared code, and also in any sort of enforcement of ethical guidelines. In turn, each museum is its own enforcer and creator of its own working code of ethics. At this point, no restrictions preventing over-restoration, over-paintings, or reconstructions for example exist in a universal form. One suggestion in \textit{Premeditated Man} to remedy this problem is the

\textsuperscript{30} The Museum Association's guidelines request its members to adopt their codes in practice.
idea of a panel of non-experts to formulate ethical guidelines, though there are no
indications of this happening soon.

Ethical codes of any sort are intended to be basic principles regarding
questions of right and wrong, weighing the consequences of action. Ethical codes
are often not precise, but instead strive to address larger issues in a more general
manner. Common topics in many of these codes have included; the museum’s
responsibility in the care of its collection, deaccession procedures, the obligation to
ethical accessions, the museum’s role as a public servant, etc. Although the codes
serve to preserve and protect the works, the codes at the same time cannot be
totalities. “Effective ethics” in one book are described as ‘the marriage of moral and
political principles and an existing social force in order for change and
applicability’. Effective ethical guidelines serve the difficult task of defining ethical
problems in larger statements, while concurrently providing ample specifics, which
are constantly reviewed and renewed. A lack of enforcement makes the issue of
consequence complicated.

Another matter to keep in mind is the often-unnoticed bias of science and
technology. Both are constructions of man, and therefore susceptible to ethical
ersors. To have the ability to create and restore does not indicate that these actions
are without consequence. Advances in technology have given man the ability and
power to extend life and to provide artificial environments. The extents of

31 Melvin Kranzberg, ed., Ethics in an age of Pervasive Technology, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press,
technology are escalating by each day and there is a lack of adjustment and
anticipation to these changes.

Obligation

One of the key arguments common to many these codes is the obligation to
future generations through the conservation of these culturally deemed worthy
works, which can include extensive restoration by any technical and scientific means
available. The Museum Association’s Code of Ethics states the responsibility of the
museum includes the prevention of loss, damage or physical deterioration of any
works.32 Destruction and death can be postponed, though never fully avoided, as the
inevitable consequence of time and aging. A passive request is also made in the code
to facilitate the understanding of works, ‘while respecting as far as possible its
aesthetic, historic and physical integrity’.33 This understanding can only truly occur
though, when the work is in a visually and physically authentic state, faithful to its
own integrity. A balance between preventing any possible material loss and
maintaining a work’s integrity is found in preventative conservation, inside a
stabilised environment whilst retaining the work’s circle and maximising the
aesthetic experience of a work. Realising that every work has a finite end, as all
beings, is to maintain the truth of the work’s circle.

6.3.
6.3.
Inherent in life is death. Within the condition of being is dying. This denial of death by museums sustains certain notions of illusion. The original essence of a work continuously physically transforms due to time and natural decay, and this acknowledgement of a work’s “life” is the visually truthful route a museum should take.

In the museum’s presentation of restored works that are no longer representative of their original essence, what truths are being given then? Restored works display an assumed complete state of a work, as an illusion of the former. If a restored work essentialises an illusion of what was, or what is perceived to have been, the work’s visual authenticity disappears in restoration. Each act of restoration removes the work further and further from its origin, and in so, from its essence, truth, and authenticity. The work thus presented is a reproduction of its former essence, emitting a false impression of the original state. Each work belongs to one reality, one essence, and one evolving appearance. Restoration work depreciates the original work by presenting a reconstruction, or a simulation of the original work. Our obligation to future generations is therefore visual truth, be it in a noticeably decaying Michelangelo drawing, or an ever-changing Anselm Kiefer work. Maintaining a work’s visual purity through time is to display its material truth.

Reversibility

Another notion frequently asserted in these ethical codes is the claim of reversibility. This supposes that at any given point in time, a work can be returned
to its original state. As discussed later, reversibility is often quite subjective, or even impossible.\(^{34}\) The consequences of action taken in restoration work are not always predictable, and in past cases, claims of reversibility have been found to be false.\(^{35}\) Scientific facts that are claimed today can be found detrimental the next, and the product of extensive restoration work is, in effect, altered reproductions of the former works. Likewise, extensive use of chemicals and additional materials on works has at times proved more destructive than productive.\(^{36}\) For example, the use of chemical solvents on multi-media works has proven to be unpredictable on the other elements on the work over time.\(^{37}\) Every alteration of a work, however small, transforms the entire work and its essence. The alterations to works modify the work’s ‘thingly’ character, its visual honesty.

Prevention vs. Restoration

To differentiate preventative and restorative conservation is in the action taken directly on the material surface of a work. Conservation work is not always strictly preventative or restorative per se, for some processes entail both types of conservation. Preventative methods strive to create and maintain a stable, sterilised

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\(^{34}\) One such effect, named the “time bomb” effect, where certain applications of new technical techniques have resulted in disastrous effects at a point in the future, ultimately creating something worse than the original.


\(^{36}\) As discussed in one page at the SPAB website concerning architecture, http://www.spab.org.uk/.

environment and to provide a durable physical structure for a work, whilst maximising the work’s use and retaining the work’s integrity. The goal of preventative conservation is to inhibit further damage and deterioration without physical alteration or addition on the material surface. This prevention extends then to the storage, exhibition, use, handling and transport of the work. Environmental factors such as light, humidity, temperature, pests and atmospheric pollution are monitored in the near clinical environment of the museum.

Restorative methods, on the other hand, recreate damaged or missing elements by material evidence such as photographs, condition reports, purchase agreements and sales records. Restorative conservation as defined in the UKIC handbook attempts ‘to recreate, in whole or part, the missing elements... based on historical, literary, graphic, pictorial, oral, archaeological and scientific evidence’\textsuperscript{38}, to a specifically chosen earlier state of a work. Reconstructive work is essentially subjective, as no methods of in-depth research can reproduce essence or individuality. As a work is continually restored, layer upon layer of subjective visual illusion is built. Further, the dignity of the original is lost in this process of restoration. As a medical clone may have an exact genetic make-up as the original, the clone is thus still a copy, distanced by the original creation, time and space of the authentic work.

Further, the chosen point of a particular state of being of a work is often times either the condition of the work at the time of purchase, or when the work was deemed the most ‘valuable’ (or at times, this point is found to be both). This value

\textsuperscript{38} UKIC Member’s Handbook, glossary of terms, p.55.
again extends beyond the monetary value to the historical or cultural significance. This chosen earlier state can also never be fully re-experienced, though conservators attempt this re-experience by artificial means in conservation work, justified by their material documents and research.

Even a painstaking transmission of works to posterity, all scientific effort to regain them, no longer reach the work’s own being, but only a remembrance of it.39

A contemporary identification is made with a point in the past that (has attempted) to be re-established, accomplished by artificial means. A fantasy in the museum has been built to give the impression that the works are immortal, immovable, unaging, set in their timeless surroundings. In restoration work, the marks of time and history are attempted to be physically erased from the work.

This difference of action taken or not taken on a work is a topic that has been long discussed. For example, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, founded by William Morris in 1877, has specific aims of preventing the restoration work which has been determined to do more damage, or which creates a falsified version, to a work. Further, the Society describes work that has been restored in such a manner to be a ‘lifeless forgery’ devoid of scholarly merit.40 Buildings restored in such an extent should no longer be looked at for merit, or authenticity, as the Society considers the process of restoration of addition and subtraction to be stripping a work of its history, its life; similar to the alteration of essence discussed earlier. As in the preventative ethos of conservation, the Society

carries out structural work and stabilises environmental conditions where possible, but will not create any noticeable physical alterations to the work. Perhaps a motto for the Society (and this paper) could be found in the words of Leonard Courtney in 1878 when he stated, ‘Let dead things go, let living things be kept’. 41

Utility and authenticity

Another interesting idea in Assessing Risk Management is the determination of a time length of use and display for each work. The first consideration in stabilising the environment and in the use of a work is prior even to any attempt of restorative work. Further, all points of restoration are checked and re-checked by a number of individuals. The understanding is then made of individual accountability to work taken, and also of the ethical implications of conservation work to future generations is, as in conservation departments such as the Victoria and Albert Museum, 42 the responsibility of each conservator.

Authenticity is never reproducible. Problems of authenticity arise from the point of acquisition; for example, in what state of being does the work arrive, and how does one know this stage is necessarily authentic? No amount of documentation or scientific reproducibility can ever recreate the original situation in which a work was derived. Elements of origin (time, space and material) cannot be reproduced or rediscovered by any means. Although, also to note, the state of authenticity is

42 Headed by Jon Ashley-Smith, interestingly.
arguable in the sense that the original state of a work can never be fully known, and therefore impossible to determine whether or not the current state of a work is authentic. The closest state to the authentic original is then the accessioned state. For a work to remain as close as possible to the original material, time and space is to remain the most authentic.

The illusion of authentic works is translated in the presentation of restored works. A common unwritten rule followed by many conservators, as the ones at the Royal Armouries in Leeds, is the “6 and 6 rule”. From six feet away, the object appears to be in the original state to the ordinary passing viewer, yet from six inches the restoration work should be perceptible to either a professional or an extremely observant visitor. However, this rule attempts to hide the restoration work, creating a simulated look of an authentic work. The perceived illusion of the state of the original is often disguised, by the six and six rule and other methods, to attempt to become an imperceptible element. A seemingly flawless layer is presented as the complete work.

Another illusionary technique, practiced especially in early 20th century restoration, was the use of materials that would seemingly create the appearance of the original surface by using carefully blended pigments matching the original, or by using similar materials of the same colour, texture and material characteristic. Alternatives to this particular method have been to clearly distinguish the restoration work from the original by using contrasting colour or material.

43 Also explained in Andrew Oddy, ed., The Art of the conservator, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) p.11, also in interview with Suzanne Kitto and Chris Smith.
The concern for the preservation of works is in part a concern to preserve self. In preservation, a point in the past is identified with the self and with society and applied to a work, where we have been, what we have done, where we perceive to be going. The retention and preservance of past works by society is part of an older human ritual. The past is looked to for guidance for the future. The instinctive fear of death, loss and decay in many societies is found to be the obverse of the love of life. In many societies, issues of death are pushed to a remote point, away from sight and thought. Often, the event of death is thought of as an indefinite point in time to the distant future, and not pertinent to the present. Death is thus pushed out of the mind, until direct contact is required.

The appearance of the new, restored work is habitually the more desirable, even by artificial means of conservation. A fantasy of attaining the original state of being is granted in restoration work, where an impression of a new, restored work is given. Yet, much like the “new car” scent packaged and sold, the illusion eventually fades. The longevity of the created fantasy is indeterminate, yet all matter deteriorates in due time. This relation of illusion of a perfect, original state again distances the viewer further from the origin, and from the truth of a work’s being. Attempting to recreate a work to the look of the new, original state signifies in part the desire for the ability to “play god”, in a manner of speaking, by the ability to reconstruct or renew life and matter, similar to the fabled fountain of youth.

In a sense, science has enabled society to fulfil this desire of prolonged life. Technological and scientific abilities to create and restore have limitations and the eventual material demise of each individual and work is imminent. Preserving and restoring works thus prolong life, perhaps also serving as a compulsory memory for society of itself. Heavily restored works convey a false state of being and truth in its added layers. Material clarity in the incorporation of time, space and material is the only true realisation of truth in a work. Restoration work is therefore a depreciation of the original work from its essence, a loss of its authenticity and meaning. Natural transformation and change occurs over time and through activity, though transformation by restoration is an intentional alteration and therefore detrimental to the work’s authenticity and significance.

Art, like life, ends

The point of death in a work is an interesting issue. When a work has been deemed to be at a value of zero, its integrity has fallen below the acceptable level to be displayed or used. In the course of the work’s material life, the value of a work undergoes constant change in its monetary, social, informational, emotional and physical states. As related in Jaques Derrida’s *Gift of Death*, there is an ‘anticipation of death’, as a key of the realisation of life. To accept and acknowledge death is to

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Eva Hesse, as quoted in leaflet from Tate Modern from Eva Hesse exhibition 13 November 2002-9 March 2003, p.9.
then accept the material or finite confines of the temporal world, and to dispel illusions of immortality. New works emerge in the death of the old works.

There would be no light if there were no darkness; and where there is no darkness the light cannot exist. 47

A work that is in accordance with its origin and its end retains its individual truth, participating to and of its own material issues or materiality, a non-reproducible attribute of being. Icons of culture change over time and as such, old icons give way to new. Death cannot be escaped, as mandatory condition of the material nature of every work. The destiny of death is fundamental to all matter. Any amount of avoidance or prolongment of death through restoration does not eliminate the issue of material temporality.

As material change is not damage, but part of existence, death and destruction are not negative occurrences, but merely natural processes. Loss, material change and chance are inherent characteristics in the unpredictable nature of life. By every work’s eventual destruction, ‘... is the possibility of being becomes actual, in it beings fulfil their “determination” with birth is inclusive of eventual death’. 48 The determination of each work is in its need to complete and fulfil its material intentions. Time, nature and age also have their effects on the material of works.

The experience of an authentic work is a primary obligation not only to our own time, but also to future generations. The authentic experience of a work is

bound by a limited timeframe and through reconstructions attempt to extend the
timeframe indefinitely. The experience of visual truth of the authentic work
outweighs issues of endurance and longevity through restoration. This experience is
not a singular, defined event, but is renewed moment-to-moment, by time, context,
environment, condition or interpretation.

To burn always with this hard gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy is
success in life. 49

The sensation in the experience of the real, in the authentic state, is the
experience of the intense ‘thingness’ of a work.

A balance can be struck where the realisation of life and death can occur in
the concept of a new museum. The necessity is present for a “new museum” for a
context that is effective for all of its contents, a place that acknowledges a works’
lifespan, essence and death. The emergence of a handful of institutions capable of
the physical needs and the dialogues of newer works, such as the installation art
museum The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, PA, USA, the Barbican Centre in
London, Centre Pompidou in Paris, and Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in
Helsinki, Finland, to name a few. More often than not, these places have been
privately run galleries, such as T12 Gallery in London, (which recently displayed
Gustav Metzger’s 100,000 Newspapers exhibit). In some of the multi-functioning,
inter-disciplinary cultural centres displaying art, the inclusion of living artists in
studios, lectures or workshops bring the process of art-making to the visible surface
and in so, perhaps part of the realisation of the life qualities of all works.

Anselm Kiefer and the museum

The work of Anselm Kiefer has been written about widely, particularly for the intense subject matter. Kiefer does not typically attempt to explain or dispel any interpretations lent to his works. In a way, the choice of Anselm Kiefer is arbitrary for this discussion, in that all material works could be applied to the theory of material realisation.

Due to the nature of the size and material of Anselm Kiefer’s work, issues concerning conservation work often arise soon after purchase. Kiefer’s works characteristically have heavily worked surfaces. The visual surface, often either canvas or metal, has undergone being burned, torn and scratched. Many materials are used for aesthetic purposes, though often unevenly and randomly applied. Interestingly, a “new” Kiefer work is often already at an unstable state in its structure or material. The appearance of decay or ruin is frequently also an element of the subject matter, in addition to the desired aesthetic appearance of the work. One article likens Kiefer’s canvasses as ‘bodies of suffering’. Though this statement referred to the subject and content, an interesting application of this idea to any work, is essentially suffering bodies in the act of living.

“Typical works” \(^{31}\) of Anselm Kiefer experience a large amount of decay and loss within a rather short amount of time after construction. As consequence of the materials, chemical reactions, size, weight and the manipulation of material has lead to a heightened decay in a relatively short period of time by museum standards. Kiefer has also used aged materials, whether naturally occurring or not, in conjunction with new materials, often reacting unpredictably over time.

The specific materials in his works carry symbolic significance, either in their own limits of temporality and direct representative connotation. The decaying appearance of the visual surface of the works is part of the aesthetic choices, as in burning the canvas, or in the use of organic materials for a particular visual and symbolic significance. The roses in *Let 1000 Flowers Bloom* echo beyond their materiality, as does the salt in *Lot’s wife*. Kiefer has selectively used certain materials for their alchemical or mystic qualities, often in an extremely subtle manner.

Part of the artist’s non-specificity regarding his own works is in withholding interpretation or guidance, instead allowing the viewer’s to form their own thoughts. More often than not, a viewer is faced with an in-depth explanation from the museum on a Kiefer. Most works by Kiefer are evolving entities, constantly transforming materially. Each element naturally takes a course of action in aging and decaying, with its own chemical effects to the surrounding elements. The sheer

\(^{31}\) North Carolina Museum of Art examination report on ‘Untitled’, November 16, 1994, p.2. This is particularly the case when compared to other works’ life spans.
physicality of many of Kiefer’s canvases and the tactile material is an undeniably
unique element, as one stands in the wake of the material aura of the works.

Conservation on Anselm Kiefer’s work has varied from institution to
institution, from minimal preventative conservation to intensive full-scale
rebuilding. Some museums have only employed preventative methods on Kiefer’s
work for a variety of reasons. Certain works simply have not needed conservation
work, while others have cited reasons such as keeping in tune with Kiefer’s own
philosophy of his art,\(^5\) or simply that the particular institution strictly follows
preventative practice. Certain methods of conservation have been found both
preventative and restorative, although in varying degrees. Conserved Kiefer works,
as explored in three different case studies below, have produced rather striking
differences in the resulting works.

Osiris and Isis

The first case study to consider is in the extensive restoration completed on
*Osiris and Isis* (1985-7) (Figure 3). The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
completed two phases of conservation work on the work in 1987 and 1996.\(^5\) *Osiris
and Isis* is comprised of acrylic emulsion paints, charcoal, porcelain, copper and

\(^5\) Kiefer believes in the natural transformation of the materials in the works, in addition to the
symbolic reference of certain materials.

\(^5\) All information in this next section was taken from condition reports, photographs and writings
from the conservators provided by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art on May 28, 2003 by
Jeanne Friscia, Administrative Assistant. Conservation work in 1996 was completed by Elise S Haas
Conservation Studio.
numerous unidentifiable elements. The size and materiality of the work has created huge strains upon its own structural support, which in turn proved the most immediate conservation problem to be tackled. The substructure of Osiris and Isis was beginning to show signs of strain at the time in the initial condition report in 1987.

The work is two separate canvasses, designed to hang adjacent to each other with no visible gap. Two stacked multipartite strainers, functioning as the main support, back each canvas. The horizontal strainer bar running through the centre of each canvas is non-expandable, creating a problem of the work’s incapacity to cope with its own weight. Over time, the strainer had also caused a noticeable ridge in the canvas at the point of joining. In addition, the slack in the canvas and the weight of the various elements used had worn on its support structure. One example is the metal transistor circuit box at the top left of the right canvas, which had been attached with silicone adhesive and wire. The method of attachment had created a noticeable sag in the canvas around it. The sheer weight of the work had also created puncture tears ranging from one to six inches along the length of both canvasses as well. The decision in the first series of conservation work was that the work’s weight over time had created severe physical distortions, and was in immediate need of re-enforcement in the support structure, as well as repairs to damages already incurred.

54 Some of these elements are suggested by conservators to be principally combinations of dirt, sand and ceramic dust.
During this initial assessment, mixtures of different unidentified adhesives and acrylic paints were cited and tested on the visual surface, many of which were described by conservators as chemically incompatible elements. With enough time, the work would eventually destroy itself at the chemical level. The mixtures of adhesives resulted in separations in the paint layers over the years, and losses of varying size could be seen over the entire work. These losses were due to two main factors, one being the physical strain of the various multi-media elements to the work, such as the transistor box noted earlier and from the application of bulking agents, extenders and unknown elements to the paint, which had adverse chemical reactions. Within these areas of various paints and adhesives were other unknown elements, suggested to be dirt or ceramic dust, added as a visually textural element. The paint layers also vary from matte to glossy. Long vertical drips of paint or varnish randomly applied in Osiris and Isis are spread over the surface. Kiefer often uses materials to function aesthetically as well as structurally.

To complete a thorough assessment of the work, the visual surface was altered. The results of the condition report included a series of different stages of suggested conservation work, dependent on the predicted physical urgency and necessity as deemed by conservators. The more urgent conservation work was carried out in preparation for a loan for Kiefer’s large exhibition at the Art Institute in Chicago in 1987. The primary goal of the immediate work was to stabilise the work for transport and display at the exhibition in Chicago, yet was subsequently

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55 Another element in the work having an unknown chemical make-up, as quoted in the condition reports.
disclosed in the reports as being a temporary solution to the major conservation problems of the work.

The main form of treatment taken at this point was a “cami-lining”, where a polyester sailcloth is applied to the reverse, to reduce the chance of the canvas flexing in the future. This process is primarily preventative, though some could argue also slightly restorative, as the process requires extensive working on reverse, at times affecting areas of the material surface of the work whilst also providing necessary reinforcement to the canvas. The sailcloth is passed between the back of the work’s surface and, in this case, between the strainer bars. The fabric is then positioned and stapled to the reverse of the wooden strainer. During the process however, large cracks in the thick layers of paint on the front emerged. Also there was a slight loss of support as a result of the removal of staples, both resulting from the processes involved in the cami-lining. Some benefits of the process, though, is that the cloth also acts as an air cushion, reducing vibrations during transport and installation, and synthetic materials have been found to provide more stability in varying humidity levels. According to previous research results, the addition of the cami-lining reduces the possibility of displacement of material from vibrations approximately by half. Vibrations occurring during movement of the work had proved problematic in many other works by Kiefer. Throughout this

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56 This process has been used on other works by Kiefer, specifically on ‘Die Königin von Saba’ at the Art Gallery of Ontario.
57 One example of a material that is both aesthetic and functional.
58 Tests results quoted in the 1996 condition reports, taken from PIRA (an analytical and testing facility in England) in 1987.
59 Many institutions receive Kiefer’s work in a jumble of elements, often with detached pieces of straw, salt, dirt.
procedure, opportunities for any preventative work such as cleaning and dusting were taken when possible as well.

Further support of four carrying handles and a steel brace were attached to each section, from the reverse side. These handles provide additional relief to the weight of the work during storage, handling and installation processes. Staples were meticulously replaced in the original areas referencing previously taken photographs, and where the staples could not be reattached correctly, glue was applied. Other reinforcement elements applied during conservation work included a steel brace and additional adhesives, providing additional support to the strainer.

Although the majority of loss on *Osiris and Isis* was in the paint layer, many of the other materials on the work proved problematic. Many of the porcelain shards on the work were found to be poorly adhered. Some shards were attached only with cellophane tape. However, in making this choice, Kiefer must have been aware of the temporal nature of this procedure. Likewise, many of the copper wires had become dislodged from their original positions. The initial condition report notes a seventeen-inch segment of copper wire which had been dislodged before the museum’s accession. Although this type of wire is bendable, the wire will only endure a certain number of adjustments. In addition, segments of the wire also showed signs of corrosion, partially due to the contact with the unknown mixtures of paints and adhesives.

*Osiris and Isis* was seemingly reacting chemically with itself. The work will never return to its original state, though interestingly the original state was in fact unstable in its physical structure and material. A few examples of some features that
are both aesthetic and functional and cannot be reproduced are the admixtures of various unknown adhesives and randomly applied staples. Kiefer’s own ambiguity about the subject matter and of his work methods and materials have added more mystery to conservation efforts.

Conservation work on *Osiris and Isis* was fully documented through extensive notes and photographs, though if the main purpose of documentation were to provide a base for reversal back to the original, authentic state, in this case this process would be near impossible to accomplish. After the major structural work was completed, large losses of paint were filled in with the closest possible *artificially* made substitute, tears were mended, and, where possible, large portions of the original paint pieces reattached.

Long-term recommendations by conservators included a strong suggestion that the work not travel and that the canvases be re-stretched using custom-made, expandable stretchers in the conservation studio to further reduce material stress. The work may, or may not, endure additional years by these recommendations and conservation work, though at the sacrifice of the works’ original essence.

**Untitled**

Another example of restoration work is with the *Untitled* work (Triptych panels) (1980-6) (Figure 4) owned by the North Carolina Museum of Art. The key materials of this work are emulsion, oil, acrylic, charcoal, straw, photograph, lead, and  

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60 In this particular work, a clear adhesive had been specially toned by Kiefer.
assorted boulders, a ladder and a metal funnel. At the time of purchase in 1994, the work was in the state of loose elements; jumbled cables, straw, wire mesh and around 600 pounds of boulders. An initial observation noted an inconsistent and unknown extent of previous conservation work. During the first assessment by the North Carolina museum, conservators were at times unsure which were the original elements and which were additions or alterations. Although the original elements were used when possible, new cables and other reproduced elements were used. Kiefer indirectly approved major repositions of materials through a representative from his gallery, Anthony d’Offay.

The main support of each panel is a double pine strainer with one vertical and two horizontal cross bars, with an additional strainer. The artist had added smaller support elements such as wooden slats intermittently over the work. The surface is again highly manipulated; burned, patched and glued.

The condition report addresses each panel individually, though each panel has a similar base of support and construction, as outlined above. Overall, the support structure is deemed stable and no further conservation work anticipated. The first panel assessed is the left panel, identified by the six large boulders. The boulders hang from the top of the panel, and had been coated in lead, creating a strange ‘lava-like’ texture. Over time, the application of lead had caused areas of oxidation on the boulders, creating a medium grey colour resulting from this effect. When positioned correctly, the boulders are supported by a steel "L" bracket, running the length of the top of the work and attaching to the reverse side with

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screws. To support the weight of the boulders, the brackets were comprised of several pieces welded together.

The boulders had created several indentations on the visible surface of the work. The weight of the boulders had also left impressions along the top edge, where the cables holding the boulders were attached. The screws from the brackets holding the cables had also produced marks on the front of the work. Indentations of Phillips-head screws protrude on several areas of the work, showing the different positions of the cables over time.

As well, the cables that had suspended the work when installed, had worn marks through the oxidised layer of the boulders. Some of the worn parts revealed different tones of silver or ochre resulting from the wear. Four different gauges of cable were also found in the initial assessment, though only one or two of the types of gauge are believed to be the original. As the extent of the previous conservation work is not known, dissimilar elements are found throughout the work, often with the intention of providing additional support. The added cables were supposed to have been toned to blend in with the work.

The centre panel has a T-shaped pipe and a ladder attached to its surface. Losses of the tacking margin in this panel occur along the edges of the long sides, visible from the sides. Holes are visible across the front side, mainly serving as a presumably aesthetic choice. Likewise, random areas of non-functional staples run across the front.

Different rates of loss in the mixed material were realised at the time of accession. Missing elements found in earlier photographs had provided some clues
for conservators, but the problem remained of replacing and reattaching the lost pieces. Upon arrival, loose bits of assorted materials such as paper ribbon, staples and straw were found lining the packing crates. Other segments of the work were also rapidly becoming separated at the time of the report.

The ladder is constructed of one-inch strips of lead, which had been twisted, curled and welded together. The ladder is attached to the work by a number of staples and by the support of a lead pipe. The pipe is screwed directly into the canvas. In the construction of the ladder, the structure can be easily distorted, even in the most careful installation handling and transport. Some of the rungs are detached on one side, possibly originally intended. When received, the ladder was flattened during transport and small fractures appeared over the surface. Further, the decision was made that the full restoration of the funnel would induce additional breakage on the visible surface of the funnel.

The third panel contains a large handmade lead funnel. Minor losses are noticeable over the entire work, though this panel displayed splitting and soiling on the wood framework. An unknown white deposit is found over much of the lead. This could be due to a chemical reaction on the surface of the work, or of Kiefer's manipulation of the surface in unusual methods. Also, the condition of the funnel was distorted from the original state.

Small elements over the right panel provide additional support. One section of canvas on the panel contains layered canvas pieces adhered for increased support to the work. The inconsistent, rigid surfaces from the different materials add
physical strain to the panel. The addition of wood slats to the reverse has provided additional support to the work.

This panel is especially affected by its own material and by the workings of Kiefer’s artistic process. Holes cover a large amount of the surface of the panel, with some functioning as screw holes. The canvas is stained due to the use of a laminate and chemically by certain elements reactive with the canvas as well as physically caused distortions.

Recommendations from the initial report include consolidation of loose fragments, reattachments and reinforcements of areas such as the rungs on the ladder, straightening and reinforcing of the lead funnel. Initial work primarily focused on consolidating material that were either well documented or evident to the exact placement, or not on the visible surface. One noticeable exception is seen in the application of toned linen thread that matches the hue of the rungs of the ladder. The threads serve to prevent further distortion due to the malleability of material. Loose materials over the surface were reinforced with adhesives.

Elements either lost or added to the work62 before the accession by North Carolina appear over the entire work, creating doubts in the proposed direction of conservation work. Impressions and voids on the surface are visible where bits of lead and other material had fallen. The extent of loss is unknown, despite research of photographs63 and a consultation with Kiefer. Questions of the original state, the

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62 Examples of this are the extensive and irreversible workings on the funnel on the third panel, the presumed additions of different gauges of wire to the boulders, and the numerous missing elements appearing in earlier photographs of the work.

63 Mainly taken from the #16 Christie’s Auction Catalogue.
aging process and chemical reactions were raised as to Kiefer’s intention, as well as the work’s material intention and change.

The consultation with Kiefer seems to have been important to the museum, as conservation work was delayed almost an entire year due to Kiefer’s overdue response. Kiefer’s actual involvement during the restoration process was minor. The museum’s conservators communicated with Kiefer for advice on the best manner to proceed and initially contacted him and how extensive the restoration process should extend. Through his gallery representative, Lorcan O’Neill, the message was relayed that certain work on the funnel was approved. However, this approval was specifically for the maintaining of structural elements, and did not include work on the non-structural elements, such as the burned segments of canvas or the effect of corrosion and aging that had chemically occurred. As summarised by O’Neill,

Kiefer has a philosophical attitude to the patina that some of the materials he uses acquires. Lead is a malleable material and part of its usefulness for him is that it takes so readily to the evidence of time and wear.  

Some of the conservation work proposed was determined to be risky, in that the state and materials of the work could not be reworked in a faithful manner, particularly on the visible surface. Many of the metal elements in particular would not withstand any extensive workings. The funnel received some work, but in a manner that the resulting visible surface did not display the restoration work. A cut was made on a portion of the funnel, and reinforcement pieces were added to the support of the funnel in the attempt to counter-act further damage.

64 Statements taken from fax from Lorcan O’Neil to John Coffey, Chief Curator on October 15, 2001.
In fact, even in the apparent state of decay and instability of his works, Kiefer regarded the work as merely running its course. Like Osiris and Isis, the massive weight and size of the work had greatly worn away upon its own structure. The surface of Untitled had been found to retain enough plasticity to postpone certain conservation work at the initial condition report, though on-going decay and chemical processes were more advanced and apparent in the case of Untitled.

Certain materials were found unidentifiable due to the degree of chemical reactions and the resulting natural transformation of the various materials. The use of lead over much of the surface of the work caused chemical incompatibility in conjunction with other areas. Interestingly included in the report was the acknowledgement as to Kiefer’s intentional use of discordant material and a heavily worked and aged canvas as an element and therefore, not considered to be loss or damage, but a quality of being to Kiefer’s work.

Lot’s Wife

This case study differs from the previous ones in that the conservation work is extremely minimal. No major conservation work has taken place to date on Lot’s Wife (Figure 5), though a few preventative measures have been taken, including the handling and movement of the work is kept to an absolute minimum. The work has not been permitted to travel since 2000 mainly due to the delicacy of material and the work’s weight of nearly 1200 pounds.
The work is constructed of two lead panels, hanging horizontally. A wooden support of plywood runs horizontally and vertically on the reverse side. Unlike the previous works, the support structure is in a stable condition. The lead foil is adhered to the wood with staples, presumed for added support during the drying of the adhesive. The lead foil and the applied canvas are heavily worked and distressed, possibly treated with hydrochloric acid. Kiefer has used chemicals in a purposeful manner, aware of alchemical changes, though unsure of the extent.

Interestingly, the Cleveland Museum of Art’s conservation files include extensive research and consideration of the artist’s intent and philosophy of the care of his works. In the research completed by the Cleveland Museum of Art on Lot’s Wife, the conservators found that in Kiefer’s working practice, the large lead sheets had been intentionally worn and weathered for aesthetic purposes. The panels were left outdoors for a period of time and then they were driven over and walked upon. Footprints and tire tracks are still visible in certain areas of the top panel.

A large portion of the top panel is covered in a salt wash, creating a cloud-like affect on the surface. The salt mixture was produced by an interesting series of chemical alterations. The salt is first mixed with water and an electrical current passed through the mixture. This produces hydrogen and chlorine gas, leaving sodium hydroxide, or caustic soda. Kiefer then adds an adhesive and applies the paste to the weathered lead foil. The mixture dries, producing a cloudy, almost milky, effect, while also retaining some of the grains of salt. This mixture is actually toxic, and may cause chemical reactions to the lead over time, though the
effects are unknown due to the addition of the adhesive and the impurities of the lead surface. The basic chemical make-up of the mixture was found unstable.

A side effect of this process is an increased sensitivity to changing levels of humidity. High levels of humidity would cause the salt mixture to liquefy. Also, over time the mixture tends to crack and flake. Since the museum’s acquisition in 1990, the bulk of the on-going loss on Lot’s Wife has been in the salt mixture. The aged, yellow tone of the salt could possibly be the result of the chemical reactions of the mixture with the impure, weathered metal, or changes in humidity that have altered the RH levels.

The bottom panel is identical in construction to the top, though the lead has white chemical stains throughout the surface, some rust stains and three pieces of canvas applied to the lead. The rust stains are likely resultant of the contact of the iron element above the canvas. The canvas is adhered by a grey-coloured polyurethane adhesive. The canvas on the lower panel is extremely unstable, as large holes have been torched or torn into the surface, and the edges frayed. Areas of the canvas have buckled due to the thick application of paint and other materials, in addition with unknown adhesives from the reverse side.

Linseed oil and polymer emulsion have been dripped over segments of the lower panel, in a dilute mixture. Ashes, flakes of metal filings and white threads resembling fibreglass were added to the paint before the drying process was complete. The paint layers fluctuate over the entire work, though the application of multiple layers of paint and other media on an unstable, incomplete canvas results in an almost daily changing work. The work is monitored weekly, and the larger fallen
fragments are collected and filed. Small areas of the canvas have been consolidated, primarily using BEVA film, where the film is tacked to the metal. To date, this method of conservation has only been used twice, in March and June 1992.

The lower panel also includes a copper heating coil, attached by copper wires and a string. Similar to Untitled, a layer of green corrosion covers most of the surface of the metal. There is also a white encrustation over the surface of the coil, suggested to be a calcium deposit.

The conserved works prove to be quite deceptive, with the aged surfaces especially problematic. Restoration work on Osiris and Isis, for example, may not be recognised by most viewers. As Kiefer’s works offer countless difficulties in his ambiguity in explanation, the ranges of materials used have certain continuous physical and chemical transformations over time prove problematic for recurring viewers and for conservators. The Cleveland Museum of Art has ruled out restorative methods for the time being, only if preventative means no longer sustain the work. The sustainability and maintenance of a Kiefer work is on a shorter timeline than many other works. The three case studies in this paper present different conservation methods and extents, and therefore, different resulting works.

Kiefer has previously stated that his works are in a state of constant physical transformation, 'sometimes having lives of their own'. Further, in another revealing statement by the artist,

Each layer shines through, and so I work according to a kind of 'inverted archaeological' principle. I begin work with the greatest degree of

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imprecision and arrive at the greatest possible clarity— in the sense of giving a meaning."\(^66\)

This moment of clarity of a work, even in the seemingly worn appearance of a new work by Kiefer, is at this moment of conception in a work’s true essence. Kiefer’s works exist, resultant of conscious decisions and choices by the artist to form a work. From the point of origin, time and nature together take their course. The truth of a work occurs at birth, death and the completion and in abiding by its circle.

One article draws the conclusion that to purchase a work of Kiefer is to also carry the ‘moral commitment’\(^67\) to both the physical implications of the work, and the intense subject matter. Can these ethical and moral commitments be put into usable guidelines for museums? To generalize ethical issues would entail ignoring the physical intentions of the individual work, making any such universal guidelines useless. As conservation work is completed on a case-by-case basis, any attempt at ethical guidelines should follow suit. If definite rules were drawn, they would surely fall short in application. The enforcement of ethical guidelines is a difficult task, for ‘...ethics is a system of law from which the legislator has been removed’.\(^68\)

Conservation needs differ for every work. Perhaps, more effective, and the most visually authentic, is the exclusive use of preventative methods in conservation, but ultimately allowing each work to bear the marks of its own existence. An authentic work is a work which has retained the outer layer to its circle, its essence. Preventative conservation does not impede on this layer, but

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maintains it. Restorative conservation alters the visual layers by its processes. A simulation of the original is created as in the outcome of restorative conservation. Each work completes its circle, in turn making way for new works.

Kiefer's works, and all work, are existential beings. The work is a creation that is both physical and natural, within the bounds of mortality that even art cannot transcend. The physical boundaries of a work are known in the material limits of each medium, and in retaining of its place in time and space.

Only to be sure it is passion- that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moment's sake.69

And in that moment of an authentic work, the experience of a fullness of essence transpires.

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69 Walter Pater (1899), op. cit., p.252.
The physical state of a work, taken in part from Heidegger's idea of a virtuous circle

Figure 1
Is action needed? Why?
Have I consulted all existing records?
Do I need to consult clients (including visitors), peers, other specialists?
Have I considered all the factors contributing to the identification and significance of the object(s): historical, technical, associations, sacred, maker’s intentions?
Do I have enough information and skill to access and implement these actions?
What are my options for action that will produce an acceptable result with minimum intervention?
What are the pros and cons of each course of action?
Can the use or environment be adapted instead of intervening with the objects?
What are the resource implications of my action(s) and is my intended action the best use of resources?
Do established courses of action need to be new ones developed?
Are all my actions fully documented to a known and accepted standard; images, written on object(s)?
Are all records accessible to the appropriate users?
How will my actions affect subsequent actions?
Have I taken into account future use and location of the objects?
How will I assess the success of any actions and how will I get feedback from clients and peers?

Figure 2
Figure 3
Anselm Kiefer, *Osiris and Isis*, (1985-7),
http://www.sfmoma.org/collections/painting+sculpture/ma_coll_kiefer_osiris.html

Figure 4
Anselm Kiefer, *Untitled (Triptych)*, (1980-6),
Figure 5
Unpublished

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