

POSTHUMAN ART CONSERVATION CURRICULUM

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Introduction

Art conservation as a field has not begun to consider the possibilities of dynamic relations and shared intensities between humans and nonhumans. In efforts to venture beyond human-centered limits, this article asks, what if art conservation curriculum was reconsidered as an indwelling accessed through speculative and affective narrative? In response, we offer a version of posthuman art conservation curriculum that, grounded in affirmative ethics, appreciates human and nonhuman entities as entangled beings with multi-directional affects and shared trauma warranting healing environments.

This article is inspired by Scott Peck's (one of the authors) attempts to transgress current art conservation curriculum based in large measure on a fire in his art museum that continues to think, move, and feel with him as he lives its curriculum. Scott's narrativizing of this event and his subsequent engagements with human and nonhuman agents in art conservation have provoked a re-thinking and re-practicing towards alternatives for art conservation and its curriculum. We propose posthuman art conservation curriculum as an Aokian third space, teeming with fresh paths of possibility to move us beyond Cartesian priorities.

Art Conservation Education

According to the American Institute for Conservation (Conservation Terminology, n.d.), the present definition of conservation is "the profession devoted to the preservation of cultural property for the future" through "examination, documentation, treatment and preventive care, supported by research and education" (para. 1). Typical daily activities for a conservator include preventative conservation of artwork, stabilization of damaged pieces, preservation of artwork, object

assessments, and proposing treatment plans with corresponding implementations of treatment. Scott Peck is a practicing conservator who was bench-trained (more on this below) and houses a laboratory for art conservation education within the art museum for which he serves as executive director.

Apprenticeship was the primary method of conservation education until formal university degree programs were created in the 1960s (Become a Conservator, n.d.). Conservation education occurs today through conservation organizations, formal and informal apprenticeships and mentoring, college and university courses or graduate degree programs, as well as continuing education offerings. There are two main forms of conservation education—formal higher education programs and bench training. Surveying the various curricula, most graduate level programs cover theories associated with conservation and 15-30% of total degree time is devoted to hands-on practical training in a studio or laboratory setting. Bench-training is a contemporary term for those who learn art conservation primarily through apprenticeship and practical experiences. Such guided apprenticeship involves accredited conservators mentoring and teaching conservation skills directly to learners through informal apprenticing focused upon gaining technical expertise while working on art works in art conservation facilities.

In both forms of art conservation education, like in most disciplines, a constructed, taken for granted relation between subject and object is maintained by its practitioners. In adhering to this status quo shaping of possible art conservation knowledge, curriculum via formal and informal education is set up as a search for similarities with previous practices, so much so that these similarities are rendered invisible and immutable, as if there are no alternatives. This devotion to a discipline's lineage maintains current boundaries.

Human-Centered Art Conservation

Permeating art conservation and its education is a bias towards a human-centric perspective that humans are supreme beings and dominate over other forms of life on the planet. Human superiority is embedded in the art-conservation-as-service view wherein the field exists to fulfill wealthy individual, corporate, institutional, and governmental contracts. Here, art conservation focuses its efforts on preserving objects of the highest value and influence, while objects of lesser value languish in long-term storage facilities (as loot, in public trust, or in private collections), get decommissioned from collections, are stolen, sold, destroyed, or even (quietly) disposed of. Art objects under neoliberal economic values are largely viewed as status symbols and financial investments, available for human consumption and exploitation. Conservators of human heritage and culture must balance the needs of the artwork with the desires of the owner and their corresponding budgets. Art conservators are rarely given the time and resources to consider how their practices

impact the environment and the planet overall such as the ecological footprint left by conservation practices. As with any neoliberal industry, frugality and efficiency are often prioritized over concerns regarding the environmental impacts and longevity of treatments associated with art conservation.

Just as a lack of conservation efforts are causing plants, bodies of water, species, mineral deposits, and animals to become extinct, the same anthropocentric predilections (Braidotti, 2013b, 2013c, 2017, 2019a; Morton, 2012) plague the world of art conservation, where the rate of deterioration outpaces the conservation of art objects. Indeed, art objects are being left to die at an alarming and unsustainable rate with more than half of the art objects in public collections in need of conservation (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009, 2010, 2019). One conclusion to draw is that there is not enough conservation education occurring. Another supposition is that not enough art is being conserved today because art is something that is more readily consumed, sold, stored, or destroyed than conserved. It takes time, money, and expertise to conserve artworks. Usually, it is easier and less expensive to buy another piece of art than pursue conservation. However, art works that are collectable, high in value, and/or attract museum visitors are more often conserved for the future financial gain of owners and museums. This context led us to consider alternative modes and priorities for transforming the field that include decentering the human-bias in art conservation.

Posthumanism's Challenge to Art Conservation

Based on reevaluating the role of humankind and humanist ideals, *posthumanism* (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018) attempts to unravel the dominance of the human by introducing nonhuman perspectives (Braidotti, 2017, 2019c). Here, nonhumans are no longer reliant on humans to discover and attach meanings to them, for nonhumans are instead viewed with the agency to shape their own meanings and realities (Barad, 2003, 2007). Posthumanism embraces the interdependence between humans and nonhumans in knowledge production, thereby challenging traditional tenants of curriculum design and pedagogies of education reliant on humanism (Andreasen Lysgaard, Bengtsson, & Hauberg-Lund Laugesen, 2019; Conrad & Wiebe, 2022; jagodzinski, 2018; Jickling, Blenkinsop, Timmerman, De Danann Sitka-Sage, 2018; Paulsen, jagodzinski, & Hawke, 2022; Snaza & Weaver, 2015; Taylor & Bayley, 2019).

Currently, the field of art conservation concentrates on one-way treatments without considering how materials intensely interact with humans in myriad ways. While conservators concede that art objects are not static or in a fixed state—their profession relies on the deterioration of art objects—art conservators study, move with, and act on matter in order to reverse this form of dying. However, accepting vibrant materials-based object (Bennett, 2010) being comes through the realization that matter itself moves, changes, perceives, thinks, shifts, becomes, knows, and transforms

(Stern, 2018, p. 1) in ways we cannot always control, in modes that permeate our bodies, while sharing intensities and traumas with other beings, human and nonhuman alike. Art conservators tend to reduce this wildly complex vibrancy down to surface deterioration they can reverse and control.

Posthuman Art Conservation, A Proposal

As art conservation is an interdisciplinary practice at the intersection of the humanities and sciences, it struck us as a rich site in which to rethink posthuman curriculum and knowledge production in ways that engage human/nonhuman vibrancy. It is our gambit that art conservation might provoke pathways in which to integrate posthumanism into curriculum by re-conceptualizing nonhuman and human relations (Bogost, 2012; Bryant, 2011; Snaza & Weaver, 2015; Weaver, 2018). In this belief, we propose a response to Weaver's (2018) call to action for "curriculum studies to engage with/in science" (p. 6). We see the sciences as not only the basis for much art conservation knowledge, but immersion in the field of physics in particular has challenged art conservation beyond neoliberal and humanist limitations. Like Weaver (2018), we find that Karen Barad's ideas on physics are inspiring a rethinking of traditional notions of reality, nature, and objectivity (p. 171). As offered in this article, posthuman art conservation curriculum speculates on the agencies, entanglements, and intra-activities of both the nonhuman and the human through incorporating insights from physics to re-conceptualize the field.

Whereas curriculum in art conservation encompasses art objects and materials used in the processes of restoration through hands-on, experiential learning with mentors, it might also be expanded to include holistic, sensual, and speculative encounters with nonhumans wherein students experience and document their own material entanglements with art objects and associated materials. Entanglement is a term from physics describing the literal intertwining of meaning and matter (Barad, 2007; Bohm, 1951; Wheeler, 1978; Wheeler & Zurek, 1983). A posthuman approach frees art conservators to move from current limits towards a more balanced perspective decentering the human (Braidotti, 2019b) and what it means to be human while allowing for more material- and object-centered practices. For example, students could be provoked to "build stories that achieve a sympathy with...material agency" (Stern, 2018, p. 15) giving voice to material entities and encounters.

Narrativizing Art Conservation

In art conservation, disciplinary writing forms (including condition reports, materials analysis, and treatment descriptions) are deemed valid as objective reporting of facts. First-person accounts would be considered too subjective and lacking in rational control. This denial of the idiosyncratic nature of conserving art objects disavows the depth of insight and speculation possible in thinking within the intimate encounters between human and nonhuman. Opening these disciplinary writing rituals to

self/other inquiry through forms of narrativization might offer opportunities to widen conservation from the objective towards the affective. Conservator reports might be transformed to include self-writings and imaginative self-expressions associated with narratives such as creative speculations, documentations of nonhuman experiences and affects, multi-directional empathy mapping, sketches of pluralistic reflexivity, shared trauma analysis, and conjectures on possibilities for reciprocal healing. In these efforts, professional, personal, and eco-ethics might be surfaced and used while considering the ongoing unraveling of Cartesian partialities while working and thinking with nonhuman lives in art conservation.

Like art itself, stories can revive a memory, distil experience, extend immediacy, deconstruct pasts and presents, expand status quo forms of engagement, amplify sensations, and conjure affects within complex systems yet to be thought (Stern, 2018, p. 3). Narrating brings together in-tensioned possibilities both affect and reflection thereby allowing for the *moreness* that “things can and might produce, together” (Stern, 2018, p. 3). Correspondingly, narrativizing facilitates an amplification of what might be perceived, considered, theorized, and acted upon, offering a potency of the present encounter with an art object in an enlarged, ecological, and affective circumstance. It is our contention that speculative storytelling of the strains and pressures flourishing between extremes of the human and the nonhuman might advance art conservation beyond current moorings.

Storying Fire

The event that facilitated Scott’s urgent awareness of art conservation’s limitations was a catastrophic museum fire in 2005. This museum has always been used as a site for conservation education initiatives led by Scott. Yet, during the museum’s rebuilding in the aftermath, the fire event necessitated and invited a radical rethinking of conservation education and curriculum in a posthuman key. Throughout this article, identified via italicized and indented font, are some of Scott’s attempts to story this traumatic and transformative experience while working to decenter his humanist perspective as he grapples with the thresholds of his art conservation knowledge.

The museum was built in the 1960s and did not have a fire suppression system. The idea of someone still being inside kept hitting me. Is there anyone else in there? I searched and searched. No one was there.

Once all visitors and employees were safely out of the building, my reaction was to grab a fire extinguisher to try to put out the flames and save the art objects I was responsible for because the fire trucks had still not arrived.

I went back in.

I was incredibly alone with the fire and its fuel.

It was as if time was standing still as I watching the flames spreading from the rear galleries forward, consuming the art objects at differing speeds. There were curtains of fire from floor to the ceiling distinct from anything I had ever seen. The sounds were like the roars of a vicious beast. I felt so helpless as the fire raged. It was as if this fire was alive consuming the art object lives and threatening mine.

The inferno grew into a true six alarm fire, with six firehouses called in to battle the blaze and more than 100 firefighters acting in over 90-degree Fahrenheit temperatures.

The major flames were quenched after about eight hours. However, flame-ups continued, taking three days for firefighters to fully vanquish the fire. Honestly, it seemed as if the fire had a vibrancy of its own over which humans held little power.

Scott's actions altered his body more severely than if he had just waited for the fire trucks. Consequently, Scott realized he was manifesting the fallacy that humans are all-powerful over objects and matter with superior intelligence and infallibility. This is what human-centered art conservation made him believe—that Scott could save objects and control nonhuman reactions, reverse damage, and never experience shared trauma with objects. Yet this inculcated disciplinary subjectivity betrayed Scott's body and negatively impacted his quality of life as the force of the fire overpowered human ability. In light of this event, Scott knew his previous perspectives would not be sustainable going forward into the future and sought to re-evaluate his professional and curricular ambitions.

We burn — art object and human. We blister together. We transform — art altered into particles landing on my skin and inhaled in my lungs. As the art is consumed by the fire, I consume the art particles and am changed through this contact.

Beyond the oxygen that we both breathe, the life of the fire needs fuel. In our tingling communion — art and human — we agonize and suffer in this hell storm. The roasting flames blaze and consume us. The particles and elements melded together in the recreation of art and human responding at different paces to the chemical reaction of fire leaving shifted forms in its wake. The limits of art life dangling on the precipice of becoming something else — after-art life.

Sweating, Singeing. Searing. Scorching. Charring. Both you, dear art, and me, we are tortured in the fiery flames.

Consumed by the fire we are but smoke, soot, ash, and debris, rising and falling, chemicals changing composition. We are in the process of dying together — atoms, ions, particles, molecules, phases, and elements of matter transforming. Solids into liquids and gases. Dying, yet closer to the origins of all life.

You are gone forever as the art I knew but have we not survived through transformation? I am no longer simply human. I am part fire and part art object, with art and fire in my lungs and in my skin.

Scott's narrativization re-visits, re-views, and re-embodies his prior experiences to amplify, unlearn, express, and speculate again on those initial events. This entrée into expansiveness also widens one's aperture to consider events from objects', materials', forces', and concepts' points of view by thinking, moving, and feeling affectively and narratively with them. In posthuman art conservation, such stories could be integrated into treatment reports as a reflective possibility to look, feel, and think again with the unrepresentable and unthinkable in human motives, goals, willful ignorances, affects, and intensities as they pass in myriad paths between, for example, fire, conservator, and art object.

Affective Art Conservation

The working assumption normalized by current versions of art conservation is that interactions between human and nonhuman are unidirectional—art conservators apply treatments to heal lesser, flawed objects without exchange, much like planned curriculum where educators impart knowledge on ignorant pupils without valid knowledge returned. In this framing, art conservation's ignored and null curricula (Eisner, 2002, p. 97; Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986) would encompass any knowledge that might point to or disclose content outside of this *modus operandi*, which excludes the idea of multidirectional influences. The following section highlights excesses associated with affect in art conservation curriculum. Marking affect as excess desensitizes and undermines one's fullness of attunement in art conservation's drive to uphold human primacy.

Ahmed's (2004) approach to emotions offers insights to analyzing affective processes absented in art conservation. Whereas Ahmed (2004) forwards emotions as socially organized reactions to affective forces in lived experiences between human and nonhuman actants that limit potential alternatives, affect itself also operates in chaotic and unnamed ways as Stern (2018) relays in the following quote:

My palms are sweaty; my heart is racing; I have butterflies in my stomach. Is this fear? Anger? Lust? All and none? The body knows, is, and does things, without "my" knowledge, desire, or comprehension. Affect is an embodied sensation and response that does not have a name (. . . yet). And here affection is a moving-thinking-feeling both before, during, and after conscious reflection, each influencing the other. Nonhuman affect is, similarly, matter's embodied sensation and response—its knowing, being, and doing. Like a human body—its liquids, solids, and gases, its chemicals, cells, and other forms—matter's various bodies also sense and make sense in and with the world. (p. 6)

Despite the affective turn in education (Dernikos et al., 2020), art conservation and its education have not yet contemplated the implications affect theory might hold for the future sustainability of practice. The porosity of human/nonhuman boundaries reflects the materialities of affective sensory and bodily engagements still not considered as a valid provocation for art conservation curriculum. However, infusing art conservation curriculum with affective intra-active potency in what might pass between human and nonhuman nurtures curiosity in the unplanned, untranslatable, or unidentifiable, and the embrace of tolerance for speculation. This entangled version of art conservation is disobedient in its perpetual becoming because it is not a finished or finite discipline.

The experience of fire can be mesmerizing. I remember my delight in watching fireplace flames change in color depending on what fuel they were burning. When I looked at the museum fire, its power came in familiar, curtain-like forms that entranced me in their compelling and contradictory unknowability.

Despite the great heat and overwhelming smoke of a fire, there are also sounds to an enormous fire that are difficult to specify. While I'd heard the crackle of a blazing fire before, those previous versions of fire had been contained under human control. The sounds of the museum fire were ravaging and brutal beyond words. Heavy and pounding.

What was it trying to tell me? Was the fire communicating in ways beyond my understanding? Were the heavy and pounding sounds of the raging fire the resonances of its life?

This museum fire was an experience of being out of control—being frozen in my inability to grasp or rein in the fire. My body was reacting in unfamiliar ways, while my brain was trying to make sense. This uncontrollable fire lifeform enthralled me as it engulfed me. I was desperate to stop it but paralyzed by my inability to understand it.

I do recall a part of me just wanting to go into the fire itself and burn up—to die with and as the art objects. My powerlessness left me in awe. Is it beckoning to me? Is my absorption in its grandeur a type of hypnosis before consumption?

Perhaps my body was asking unfamiliar, nonsensical questions of itself that I was my mind wasn't able to perceive at the time. What was my role here in relation to this form of fire? Does the fire sense or smell me before consumption? Does it know that I am here with it now? Does my sweat indicate the initial stages of my transformation into fuel? Does the fire desire me? Are their ways it changes in preparation for my consumption, like a mouth knows to salivate with anticipation?

The fire would know me as fuel that might cause the fire to crackle in a different way with an altered pace or flow from its consumption of other materials in its path. Its consumption of me might smell differently as the gases of my mortal transformation escape into the air.

Eventually, the spell over me broke and I left the burning building. I gave up, realizing there was nothing more I could do, but save myself. Yet the fire never left me as it had begun a form of consumption of me that didn't end once the fire personnel had officially put out the fire.

Anxiety. Weeks and months after the catastrophe, a mere glimpse of any kind of flame or fire would trigger a deep panic and a terror inside of me. And it was as if the hellholes would get bigger and bigger in my mind. The blaze would grow to where the flames would spread over to me and engulf me. Consumed, as if a feverish chill would go up and down my spine from head to toe. The feelings were cold and hot at the same time.

Inferno. I felt as if I was back in that building with flames of fire swallowing me up without escape. It was all in my mind. Trapped in the depths of Hell.

Not only did I have psychological trauma, but I realized that, although I hadn't burned, I did suffer the impacts of smoke inhalation and other bodily injuries. Like the damaged art objects left behind, I too needed care and conservation.

While Scott's body bears evidence of affect, his appreciation of affect has contributed significantly to moving his art conservation practice and curriculum on the path to becoming more than human in perspective with an eye to facilitating a posthuman curriculum in his art conservation teaching.

Potentialities of Indwelling Art Conservation Curriculum

Drawing on narratives from a catastrophic event, Scott's thinking with fire incites curricula that jostle between two forms—correlations (Harman, 2010) and affective speculations (Harman, 2018; Meillassoux, 2009). Correlationism involves practices adhering to pre-formed, objective, disciplinary knowledge. Another term for this would be planned curriculum where we locate what might be called best or tried and true practices encompassing conservation techniques, supposed truths about art and cleaning materials, safety guidelines, art historical facts, and treatment accounts. Any learning of art conservation would guide students to mimic these so-called stable facts in their practices ensuring the continuation of the field as human-centered. However, Scott's dwelling and lingering with the fire brought to the fore how much we don't know of what lives beyond the current parameters of art conservation. As Scott quickly realized, his formal learning came up fantastically short in the face of a force he could not control.

Affective speculations such as surprises, untruths, wanderings, fears, conjectures, confusions, awes, and futilities would be omitted from formal knowledge in art conservation. The affection and reflection presented through Scott's narrativization of the fire and its aftermath fall outside of art conservation's official documentation of treatment, all but denying from record the lived curriculum of Scott's experiences and memories. Such inhabited excesses, classified as subjective responses to a fire as event (Massumi, 2008), if expressed and considered, would throw conservation into a speculative posturing of not being in complete control of procedures and material knowledge. As Scott lived through the fire event, he could not deny his awe at the perplexing encounters—as if he didn't know what to do or think or feel. Releasing curriculum as still unfolding and open to the diversity of all lives' experiences, even those outside of human perception and consciousness, undermines humanist tropes of art conservation curriculum by instead embracing acts of conservation as involving infinite enmeshments between human and nonhuman agents (Latour, 2017; Weaver, 2015).

Ted Aoki (2005/1978) referred to the first correlational form as planned curriculum and the latter speculative/affective form as lived curriculum. Traditionally these two curricular forms are to remain separate and independent, yet as Doll (2012) warned, an overemphasis on rationality in curriculum that reduces an education to technique and skills limits our perceptions of other "possibilities that can emerge from being and living in the world" (p. 169). Instead of perpetuating the "half-life" (Aoki, 2005/1987, p. 357) of any learning, Aoki (2005/1986) encouraged educators to seek a tensioned space of possibility between the lived and the planned without too strong a dedication to extremes. To *inspirit* any curriculum (Aoki, 2005/1987, p. 1996) is to enlarge it up to the myriad opportunities and interconnections apparent in any educational act, not only among learners but within broader ecologies of life.

For our version of posthuman art conservation, Aoki's (2005/1987) inspired curriculum is extended to not only include the lives of students and educators as valued curricular knowing, but also enlivens the inanimate art object under a conservator's care and chemical reactions such as fire with a fullness of possibilities and relations. Between curriculum as planned and lived, where we may encounter Aoki's (2005/1986) indwelling or third space in art conservation education, there is a multiplicity (Aoki, 2005/1993) of quantum-based, intra-connected, reciprocal, restorative relationships constantly allowing our teaching to evolve and to go beyond the current art conservation curriculum with its human-centrism, partialities, and prejudices, moving towards the posthuman. A curriculum working from the middle between planned and lived, may infuse the breath of all life into acts of learning and curriculum.

By recommending a multifocal perspective in curriculum, Aoki (2005/1978) employed the rational or scientific *and* narrative framing of curriculum. Central to this is

narrativizing stories from the middle spaces. Accordingly, Aoki (2005/1978) proposed that the educator perform critical reflective inquiry to uncover and make “explicit the tacit and hidden assumptions and intentions held” by the educator who, through self-research, “becomes part of the object inquiry” (p. 105). Such self-in-relation-research could take the form of storytelling as the student of art conservation *becomes* the curriculum as lived. Students would then learn in the spaces between the formal curriculum as plan inherited from current versions of art conservation and varieties of the curriculum as lived in teacher/student bodies and experiences as well as in the lives of objects under conservation. This means that the indwelling between curriculum as lived and as planned in art conservation education requires active self/other unlearning on the part of students as they craft their own stories while caring for art objects, but it also means that the curriculum is always in motion, open to what specific human and object lives still might become together.

Below is Scott’s initial fire narrative attempting to access Aokian third space.

I ran into the fire instead of running away or isolating my self from it. My disciplinary knowledge as embodied plan was betraying my body. Aligned with emergency procedures, my human rationality made choices on the day of the fire based on delusions of human authority over the non-human and its irrationality. To my mind, the fire wasn’t a lifeform capable of knowledge or agency.

Little did I comprehend the multi-directional damage I was sustaining. Ultimately, I ended up becoming entangled with the lives of fire and art objects, sharing various intensities because of my so-called rational choices adhering to art conservation as plan. My denial and containment of curriculum as lived was no longer possible.

Instead of self-protection, Scott’s split-second fire responses were based on the emergency procedures for protecting art objects first and foremost. This curriculum as planned, (ironically) human-centered, emergency procedure for protecting art objects propagated the fallacy that art conservators are in a unidirectional relationship with objects where only humans can impact objects, not the other way around thereby ignoring the myriad ways humans and objects mingle with one another.

Art and Conservator Intra-Acting in Fire

Within posthumanism, humans are one part of a much larger system where nonhuman and human materials incessantly feel, think, and move all the while holding future potential for what might be (Stern, 2013, 2018). Physics and quantum mechanics term such material relations *entanglements*, wherein, for instance, the nonhuman art object and human art conservator are not merely interacting or acting upon one another but also *intra-acting* or altering each other through enactments on the atomic and subatomic levels of both human and nonhuman (Barad, 2003, 2007,

2012; Barrett & Bolt, 2012). Cellular change in a human material entity can be indication of affect occurring because of intra-activity.

The next story expresses Scott's coming to know deep entanglement as he grasps and fights for the words and concepts to express what is still happening between the fire and his body.

It has been years since the museum fire of 2005. The replaced and restored artworks along with the re-erected building hold no visible remnants of the event as all protocols have been followed and damage repaired according to disciplinary standards. However, since 2005, I have had a periodic series of lung infections. These bronchial problems put me out for two or three weeks at a time. It is as if my lung cells are different. My breathing is not the same. I seem to get sick easier. I have always had a slight case of asthma, but it seems worse than ever.

Is it possible that I may have been damaged for years by the fleeting, shared intensities of the museum fire? What if my body knows this fire in ways my rational mind can't? What agencies do fire and former art works still employ within my body? Have the materials of my body been modified and altered permanently through my other attempts at art conservation over my 25+ year career?

My encounters with the dynamic character of art have instilled hope in my soul and added resilience to my physical body throughout its cells, neural synapses, and oxygen levels, which has resulted in the lowering of blood pressure, controlled breathing rate, diminishing habitual migraines, and nurtured a stronger immune system. In this sense, art had been at work conserving and restoring me for many years. Yet the fire imprinted negatively on my body—mind and biology. Just as the museum, whose accelerated deterioration was caused by the inferno's chemical reactions, I too was in need of care.

Who will conserve me? Who will heal me now that I have healed the objects? Have I become art conservation excess or a conservation failure—am I the un-conservable? Besides the fire, what remains of my art conservation practice in my body? What other traces of my profession swim with me of which I am as yet unaware?

Such a delicate balance this permeable intra-relationship among objects and humans. To enhance the life of the fire, sacrifice was made. To enhance the life of art objects, sacrifice was made. Sacrifices for sustainability need to encompass all lives in their intricate embrace.

Scott's stories attempt to reveal the experiences between humans and nonhumans as manifold and multifaceted, instead of unidirectional—human to nonhuman only. The fire became a part of Scott. Beyond rationality, the fire was alive and still lives within him. Not only the fire, but the art objects themselves were/are part of his very

existence. Scott's being and the being of the fire have intra-acted intensely and have become intertwined.

A further example of this intra-activity is how Scott's lungs, lung cells, and the materials that make up his lungs changed through the fire event.

I breathed in chemical toxins from the fire that forever altered my ability to breathe. All of us were changing each other — the fire, the smoke, the water, the art object, and the human.

Abysmal and profound things are happening to me. I am more susceptible to respiratory problems. Sickness in my lungs happens frequently. Fever. Sweat forms on my face. Dripping water all down my body trickles. I just can't seem to get cool. It's so hot like I am forever feeling fire. My body is cooking and roasting from the inside out. The combustions are inside of me and a component of my cells. My breath is fire breath. The normal rhythms stagger and skip. Weights are on top of my chest, resulting in pangs of pain in the muscles as I inhale and exhale.

The inferno is a part of my respiratory system. I recognize that I am entangled with this hell-storm so many years later. I'm living the conservation curriculum that seems to ingest the planned curriculum, existing in a world between life and death. I'm not just spewing out objective facts and rigid technical conservation language. Human and nonhuman, we are lost somewhere in the middle. Instead, together we suffer and writhe as a type of fire breathing dragon; horrific, potent, and dangerous.

Thinking about how we all acted and continue to act upon each other is so different than the way we normally think of conservation. It is challenging to change my thought patterns and the ways my mind/body relates to the artwork I care for. I have always seen myself as distinct or separate from the art. But this is not the reality. Instead, we are intra-acting in relations at the molecular level; we are permeable and not just distinct forms.

Over time I am understanding that breathing in the smoke from the fire allowed carbon materials to clog my alveoli to permanently prevent certain cells of my body to receive oxygen. I have had intermingled exchanges of dynamism with the nonhuman. We are and always will be entangled — the human life and the nonhuman life.

Scott stories his life as entangled with countless other materials largely through particulate matter intra-acting with his porous body. Entanglements are involved in art conservation, yet the fire event and Scott's failing at conservation set out in stark relief the often nulled intricacies of human and nonhuman intra-actions that provoke an ongoing questioning of what we value in the teaching of art conservation content. Increasingly after the fire, Scott allowed his life and the life experiences of his students to penetrate his planned teachings as lived curriculum and makes ongoing adjustments to any fixed plan, such as emergency procedures, accordingly. There are

many lessons to learn from Scott's fire experiences along with the storied lives of his students living together with humans and nonhumans. This is especially so in our current times of dire environmental crises and catastrophes that threaten and touch us all.

Affirmative Ethics

Art conservation involves treatments of reversal for object trauma and atrophy on the road to object death. But as the practice of art conservation walks on death's edge in heroic acts of undoing decay and delaying deterioration, it also likely accelerates the death of our planet in the process where expediency and cost-efficiency of materials is valued over ecological impacts. To provoke ecological urgencies within posthuman art conservation is to think with the unthinkable, feared, unproductive, excess of death (of lifeforms and matter on earth), while also accepting the "creative synthesis of flows, energies and perpetual becoming" (Braidotti, 2013c, p. 131) of death.

The dead or damaged art objects and I have shared trauma through intra-actions that go so much deeper than surface treatments. It goes down to the very materials that make up our beings and how we were transformed through our fire engagements in each other's presence. My body, the fire, and the burning objects are interwoven or entangled as I am becoming the art objects through the fire. Every time I inhale, and I exhale it reminds me of the unintentional consequences of my materials, fire reactions, and the art object materials intermingling in ways that I can't control or fully understand. This ongoing dance of intra-dependent lives entails a porosity that boggles and expands my rational limits, for as beings we were already made of, from, and with fire. My museum fire event as trauma was also a violent re-turning to and rethinking of the co-dependency of all life.

Coined by Braidotti (2013a), *affirmative ethics* positively engage with trauma, suffering, and tragedy to propel "new social conditions and relations into being, out of injury and pain" (p. 129). Just as affirmative ethics transforms "pain by learning to live with death" (Stewart, 2020, p. 53), posthuman art conservation as a learning to live with death, embraces all forms of life intra-acting with all forms of death. While art conservation aspires to heal an object's damage to a point of stability, affirmative ethics provokes beyond this return, creating conditions for the material art object to thrive within long-term care commitments between art conservators acting as guardians and custodians for material entities. Reflecting on the material trauma sustained by art objects may open students of art conservation up to new potentialities of care through affective sensitizing as vulnerability and pain "express the deeply affective and relational nature of all living entities" (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 169). This ethics goes beyond art object resuscitation to intersecting ecologies within which the art objects, its materials, and custodians all might flourish.

By personally experiencing the horror of an entire art museum being destroyed by fire and then bravely revisiting this event, over and over, Scott became more aware of how art conservation is known and experienced by his body and object lives in differing ways. The most bewildering moments from his stories indicate that there exists a mutual vitality in the relationship between himself and the fire as human and nonhuman. Through a tragic event like a fire and undertaking subsequent narrativization of the events, the sharing of communal trauma between human and nonhumans, is available for others to think and feel with. Such attunement might facilitate the widening of experience and enhanced ethical engagement in art conservation to consider entanglement and the intra-agencies that transpire within, through, and around all humans and nonhumans.

Coda

The enigmas and errors ever-present in art conservation offer conditions of possibility to reconsider how the field might be felt with, moved with, and thought with. Instead of considering materials and material bodies as simply something to serve humans or to preserve for human profit, they may also be approached as having lively dynamism beyond our current limits of understanding or control. Art objects in conservation need to be embraced both narratively and affectively so that we might humble our human selves in thinking with their vast unknown-ability within curricular transgressions against an already known and fixed art conservation. To access affective modalities and encounters through speculative storying is to consider art conservation's affective agencies. Expanding how we care about our intra-actions with materials potentially informs the limits of our care for humans, nonhumans, and our intersecting ecological dependencies. Ultimately a posthuman version of art conservation curriculum may motivate reform, resulting in more sustainable and ethical conservation practices by grasping the potentialities of how the preservation of art objects encompasses entangled beings, comingling with human and nonhuman lives across this planet and beyond.

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