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Instantiation, Actualization, and Absence: The Continuation and Safeguarding of Katie Paterson's 'Future Library' (2014–2114)

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, the conservation field has developed new frameworks for works that recur in multiple manifestations, such as many time-based media, installation, and performance artworks. Within these frameworks, authenticity is gauged primarily on a manifestation's perceived compliance with the artist's directives or specifications for the work. Such models have proven difficult to apply in practice when faced with artworks in protracted states of creation, that have an existence outside the walls of the collecting institution, and whose manifestations are dispersed and distributed in space and over time. This article examines how *Future Library* (2014–2114) – a century-long public artwork by the Scottish artist Katie Paterson – confounds the two-stage model of an artwork's creation, and the conventional understanding of the artwork instantiated and made present in discrete, physical objects or events. Drawing upon Deleuze's philosophical writings, I characterize the varied ways in which an artwork or object of cultural heritage may be made present and may undergo change, while forever remaining partial, deferred, and absent. This article considers how the scope of what falls within the conservator's gaze might be widened, and how an artwork's conservation and creation might be understood as interdependent and concurrent acts of safeguarding and continuation.

RÉSUMÉ

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, le domaine de la conservation-restauration a développé de nouveaux cadres d'évaluation pour les œuvres qui se manifestent à plusieurs reprises, telles que de nombreuses œuvres temporelles, installations et performances. Au sein de ces cadres d'évaluation, l'authenticité est principalement évaluée à partir du respect apparent des directives de l'artiste ou du cahier des charges dans une manifestation de l'œuvre. De tels modèles se sont démontrés difficiles à appliquer en pratique lorsque confrontés à des œuvres en états prolongés de création, qui ont une existence en dehors des murs de l'institution muséale, et dont les manifestations se dispersent et se distribuent dans l'espace, avec le temps. Cet article examine comment *Future Library* (2014-2114), une œuvre publique centenaire par l'artiste écossaise Katie Paterson, confond le modèle à deux étapes de l'exécution et l'implémentation d'une œuvre, et la compréhension conventionnelle d'une œuvre instanciée et rendue présente à travers des objets physiques et distincts ou des événements. En s'appuyant sur les écrits philosophiques de Deleuze, je caractérise différentes manières par lesquelles une œuvre ou un objet du patrimoine culturel peut être rendu présent et peut subir des changements, tout en restant perpétuellement partiel, reporté et absent, et considère ensuite comment le champ d'action du conservateur-restaurateur peut être élargi, et comment la conservation et la création d'une œuvre peuvent être comprises comme des actes interdépendants et concomitants de sauvegarde et de continuation. Traduit par Elsa Thyss.

RESUMO

Nas últimas duas décadas, o campo da conservação desenvolveu novas estruturas para trabalhos que se repetem em múltiplas manifestações, como muitas mídias baseadas no tempo, instalações e obras de arte performáticas. Dentro dessas estruturas, a autenticidade é avaliada principalmente pela conformidade percebida de uma manifestação com as diretivas ou especificações do artista para o trabalho. Tais modelos têm se mostrado difíceis de aplicar na prática quando confrontados com obras de arte em estados prolongados de criação, que têm uma existência fora dos limites físicos da instituição colecionadora, e cujas manifestações estão dispersas e distribuídas no espaço, ao longo do tempo. Este artigo examina como a *Future Library* (Biblioteca do Futuro) (2014-2114) - uma obra de arte pública de um século da artista escocesa Katie Paterson - confunde o modelo de duas etapas da execução e implementação de uma obra de arte e a compreensão convencional da obra de arte instanciada e tornada presente em objetos ou eventos físicos discretos. Baseando-me nos escritos filosóficos de Deleuze,

ARTICLE HISTORY

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slow art; processual art;
authenticity; ontology;
instantiation

caracterizo várias maneiras pelas quais uma obra de arte ou objeto de herança cultural pode se tornar presente e pode sofrer mudanças, permanecendo para sempre parcial, adiada e ausente, então considero como o escopo do que cai no olhar do conservador pode ser ampliado, e como a conservação e criação de uma obra de arte podem ser entendidas como atos interdependentes e simultâneos de salvaguarda e continuação. Traduzido por Beatriz Haspo.

RESUMEN

Durante las últimas dos décadas, el campo de la conservación ha desarrollado nuevos marcos de referencia para obras que se repiten en múltiples manifestaciones, como muchos medios basados en el tiempo, instalaciones y obras de arte de performance. Dentro de estos marcos de referencia, la autenticidad se mide principalmente en la conformidad percibida de una manifestación con las directivas o especificaciones dadas por el artista para la obra. Tales modelos han resultado difíciles de aplicar en la práctica ante obras de arte en estados prolongados de creación, que tienen una existencia fuera de los muros de la institución que los ha coleccionado y cuyas manifestaciones se encuentran dispersas y distribuidas en el espacio, a lo largo del tiempo. Este artículo examina cómo *Future Library* (2014–2114), una obra de arte pública a lo largo de un siglo de la artista escocesa Katie Paterson, confunde el modelo de dos etapas de ejecución e implementación de una obra de arte y la comprensión convencional de la obra de arte en varias instancias y hecha presente en objetos o eventos físicos discretos. Basándome en los escritos filosóficos de Deleuze, yo caracterizo las diversas formas en que una obra de arte u objeto del patrimonio cultural puede hacerse presente y puede sufrir cambios, mientras permanece para siempre parcial, diferido y ausente, luego considero cómo el alcance de lo que cae dentro de la mirada del conservador podría ampliarse y cómo la conservación y la creación de una obra de arte podrían entenderse como actos interdependientes y concurrentes de salvaguarda y continuación. Traducción: Amparo Rueda.

1. Introduction

Contemporary artworks continue to pose many challenges to museum policies and frameworks for collecting, display, and conservation. These frameworks were originally conceived around discrete, contained, physical objects, where collection care required that an object's materiality remained static – or appeared to do so – and processes of physical deterioration were slowed or arrested. Many works of contemporary art that enter collections today involving or combining live performance, technology, and ephemeral or replenishable materials pose a challenge to material theories of conservation. Novel theories and practical approaches developed over the last twenty years have likened these works to theatrical and musical performance, which may have multiple “equally genuine instances” (Goodman 1968, 113) despite variations and differences among them, provided they remain in compliance with the artists' directives or specifications. Within these frameworks, the authenticity of a manifestation is seen as contingent on the artist's authorization or sanction and a manifestation's perceived compliance with a score, derived by establishing a set of constitutive properties through artist interviews and empirical research. Nevertheless, many contemporary artworks challenge the convention that an artwork is finished as soon as it leaves the artist's studio. For various reasons artists may continue to introduce changes to their

works even after they enter collections. This is particularly common in the case of editioned works where the artist retains their AP or “artist's proof.” Moreover, for works falling within what Renée van de Vall (2015a, 14–15) has termed the “processual paradigm,” there may not always be a clear dividing line between where and when an artwork's “execution” ends and its “implementation” begins (Goodman 1984). A growing number of contemporary artists have broken with the tradition wherein an artwork is clearly manifested or instantiated in one or more discrete physical objects, assemblages, or events. Such works existing in protracted and ambiguous states of creation pose clear challenges to existing conservation theories and practices.

Katie Paterson's *Future Library* (2014–2114) is an artwork that exceeds the conventional notion of instantiation typically associated with museum artworks. As a public artwork with a one-hundred-year duration, I use *Future Library* to elucidate the limits of documentation models and conservation frameworks conceived around artworks that recur in discrete, episodic manifestations, where authenticity is gauged based on the artist's authorization, a manifestation's compliance with the artist's directives, or a combination of the two. Through a granular examination of *Future Library*'s ontological complexity, I discuss the many ways an artwork or object of cultural heritage may be made present and may undergo change while forever remaining partial, deferred, and absent. The writing of philosopher Gilles

Deleuze is read in the context of this work to develop a more capacious and descriptive accounting of the phenomena discussed and to supplement prevailing ontological frameworks rooted in aesthetics and analytic philosophy. In doing so, I consider how the conservator's field of vision should be widened and how an artwork's creation and conservation might be reconceptualized as interdependent and concurrent acts of continuation and safeguarding.

2. Authenticity and instantiation in contemporary art conservation

Over the last two decades, the field of conservation has turned to aesthetics and analytic philosophy to reconceptualize authenticity for works of contemporary art which do not inhere through, or exist primarily in, a fixed and finite materiality. For time-based media artworks in particular the artwork's "score" has become an object of preoccupation for conservation (see in particular Viola 1999; Wegen 1999; Real 2001; Rinehart 2004; Laurenson 2004, 2006; MacDonald 2009; Noël de Tilly 2011; Vall 2015b; Phillips 2015). According to the "two-stage" model of a theatrical or musical work's creation described by Nelson Goodman (1968), a work's score is devised in an initial stage and its manifestations through performances are produced in a second stage. Goodman (1984, 143–5) has also noted that, in the performing arts, a work's "execution" – defined as "all that goes into the creation of a work" – and its "implementation" are "temporally intertwined" and views performances as a "matter of" the work's execution. The notion of "two-stage" artworks was popularized in the conservation literature by Pip Laurenson (2004, 2006) and served as the basis for Joanna Phillips' (2015) documentation model for time-based media artworks, which has been embraced by many collecting institutions around the world. Underpinning these frameworks is an ontology with origins in analytic philosophy where artworks are understood as abstract objects or *types* manifested in one or more concrete, *token* instances (for discussions of the type-token distinction (Peirce [1906] 1933) in the context of conservation theory, see Hölling (2015, 83–85; 2016, 20), Jadzińska (2016, 190) and Castriota (2019, 2021)).

In the case of installation, performance, and other repeatable works of contemporary art that may recur in multiple instantiations, authenticity is often framed as a quality that can be guaranteed by establishing a set of guidelines or parameters defined by or in consultation with the artist, and ensuring the work's various manifestations remain "compliant."¹ Within this "performance paradigm" (Vall 2015a, 11) conservators of

contemporary art often seek to establish a work's score or identity through their solicitation of "explicit sanctions" (Irvin 2005) from artists – collected through artist interviews and written instructions – and through their analyses of an artist's "tacit sanctioning" (Irvin 2005) of certain properties or formal features of a work's past manifestations. Conservation efforts have thus become directed towards methods of score reduction, with the aim of transfiguring complex, materially variable artworks into discrete, coherent, and "durable and repeatable" entities (Laurenson and van Saaze 2014, 34) that might be enacted and manifested in perpetuity (see also Tina Fiske's (2009) discussion of "tethering" and Hanna Hölling's discussion of "textual stabilization" (2016, 18)).

Latent in these approaches is the belief that a manifestation's faithful compliance with some definitive constellation of significant properties or parameters – what Rebecca Gordon termed a work's "critical mass" (2014) – allows the work to recur with authenticity and arrests any potential "erosion" of the work's identity (Fiske 2009, 234). As long as a manifestation is either authorized by the artist or remains in compliance with their directives, the common assumption is that concerns around its authenticity can be either avoided or mitigated.

However, in heritage preservation discourse authenticity is increasingly recognized as a culturally and contextually situated judgement rather than an inherent quality, one that is not solely predicated on an artist's authorization of a manifestation, nor a manifestation's compliance with the artist's directives communicated at one point in time (see Castriota 2021). The degree to which a physical object or event is regarded as a manifestation or instance of the particular artwork it is purported to be is an evidence-based judgement that may be modulated by other intersubjective factors.² Such judgements of authenticity may vary from one evaluator to the next and over time according to their values, experiences, and knowledge of an artwork and how it has been enacted or experienced in the past.

There is also a growing recognition of "unfolding" (Laurenson 2016) works of contemporary art, which trouble conservation frameworks wherein a work's "execution" is viewed as a process with a definitive endpoint, and in which a work is thought to be "implemented" and experienced solely through distinct, score-compliant manifestations. Complications may arise when the artist's directives are conflicting or continually subjected to revision; this is particularly common for editioned artworks where an artist retains their copyright and may continue to exhibit and update, re-edit, or change elements of the work. In these cases, an artwork's "score" may remain in flux and be open to interpretation

on the part of conservators, curators, and other museum staff. Additionally, an artwork's manifestations may also not always occur as discrete material assemblages or events; contemporary artworks may mix and combine live performance, social practice, digital or online dimensions, as well as a more conventional artefactual primacy placed on certain physical elements, all of which can complicate what might be considered a manifestation of a given artwork (see Davies 2010; Irvin 2013). Because these works may continue becoming or unfolding outside the walls of the museum, differences may also be introduced that escape the attention and documentary gaze of conservators, which often remains focused on material interventions or treatments and episodes of gallery display, installation, or enactment.

3. Case study: *Future Library*

Within prevailing frameworks and practical approaches for the conservation of contemporary artworks, the object of conservation has expanded away from an exclusive focus on the preservation of historic material fabric. New approaches now accommodate works that are more materially variable and that may be repeated in multiple manifestations. For these works, conservation activities are often focused on maintaining certain formal properties and enforcing compliance with specifications and directives solicited from artists around how to re-materialize and enact these works. Such approaches and frameworks are difficult to apply, however, to works that blend different traditions and practices of making and materialization, exist in protracted states of creation, and have an active life outside the walls of the museum. Here Katie Paterson's *Future Library* (2014–2114) is explored as an example of such a work. In what follows I examine the diverse ways through which this work is made present and undergoes change, introduce several new theoretical terms and concepts, and consider how this work challenges us to rethink certain entrenched assumptions we hold about how works of art are made present and the role conservators might play in mediating these processes.

3.1. Work in context

Scottish artist Katie Paterson (b. 1981) often works collaboratively with scientists and researchers to create artworks related to the cosmos, geology, and nature. For her 2010 artwork *Inside this desert lies the tiniest grain of sand*, Paterson employed nanotechnology to carve a grain of sand from the Sahara Desert to 0.00005 mm, which she then reburied in the Sahara Desert (Figure 1). For *Campo del Cielo, Field of the Sky* (2012–14), a mold

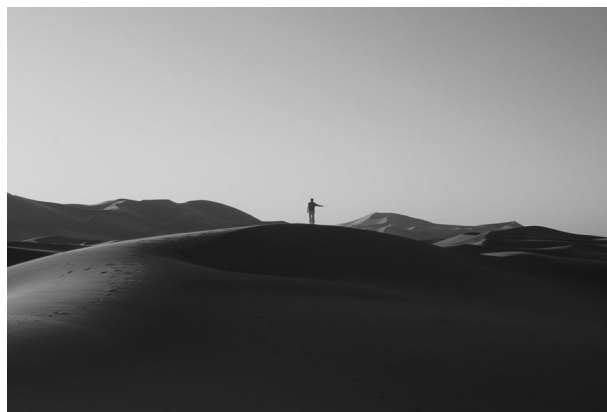


Figure 1. Katie Paterson, *Inside this desert lies the tiniest grain of sand*, 2010. Photo © MJC. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2. Katie Paterson, *Campo del Cielo, Field of the Sky*, 2012. Photo © Giorgia Polizzi, 2012. Commissioned by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London.

was taken of a meteorite, which was subsequently melted down, recast in its mold (Figure 2), and returned to space by the European Space Agency. Paterson's 2015 editioned work *Candle (from Earth into a Black Hole)* (Figure 3) consists of a white taper candle, scented in layers so that as the candle is lit and burned slowly over the course of a day various scents are emitted, layer by layer, each corresponding conceptually to the Earth, moon, planets of our solar system and beyond. In each of these and many other artworks, Paterson explores sublime temporalities and expanses, gazes into the deep time of Earth and the Universe's history, distances or quantities approaching infinity on a macro or micro scale, and natural processes that are otherwise beyond human comprehension.

Paterson's artworks also trouble conventional artwork ontologies and raise questions around what might be considered an instance or manifestation of each work. Is an instance of *Inside this desert lies the tiniest grain of sand* the few remaining atoms of the grain of



Figure 3. Katie Paterson, *Candle (from Earth into a Black Hole)*, 2015. Exhibition view Frac Franche-Comté. Photo © Oslo kommune/Sturlason, 2017.

sand the artist carved, or the entire process of the work's creation, including the gesture of its reburial in the Sahara Desert? Is *Campo del Cielo*, *Field of the Sky* the physical object that is the recast meteorite, or the performance of its selection, casting, and launch back into space? Is a manifestation of *Candle* the physical object of any one of the editioned candles, or the event of burning one and participating in its olfactory journey through the solar system?

These three works first coalesced from one of what Paterson describes as her *ideas* – conceptual artworks realized in three-line, “haiku-like” sentences describing actions, events, or things that “may or may not come into being” (Paterson 2016, 173):

*A grain of sand
carved
to only a few atoms*

*A meteorite recast
and returned
to space*

*A candle
scented as if journeying
from planet to planet*

Many of Paterson's works first germinated from this conceptual practice. These few lines of text may in some ways be thought of as very “thinly-specified” (Davies 2001; Laurenson 2006) scores for the works they engendered. Additionally, their printing on this page and the form they take in the imagination of the reader may also be thought of as token instances or manifestations of these works. Many more of Paterson's ideas have yet to be or may never be materialized in a literal sense:

*An ocean wave
stored in a deep freezer
returned in one million years*

*The speed of light
slowed to absolute
stillness*

*A reset button
for the universe
pressed only once*

These more abstract and fanciful ideas exist only as conceptual artworks, occurring and recurring each time they are called into being in the mind's eye. This is not to say that they do not exist or are not *real*; the artist describes all her ideas as “works” that “take shape in the imagination of whoever reads the words” (Paterson 2016, 173). Rather Paterson's ideas exist as fully real, albeit conceptual, artworks engaged in diverse processes of actualization, made present to audiences through their personal, creative, imaginative experiences, and – in some cases – through more tangible and formal processes of textualization, materialization, and physical enactment carried out by or at the direction of the artist.

3.2. Future Library: a history to date

In 2011 Paterson was invited by the Bjørvika Utvikling curatorial program to create a permanent, public artwork for the city of Oslo. In an interview I conducted with her in 2017, Paterson stated that “at that point I think I'd had the idea for *Future Library* but I'd really put it on the back burner as a sort of absurd thing that would just never potentially come into being” (Paterson, pers. interview with author, July 4, 2017).

*A forest
of unread books
growing over 100 years*

Like the ocean wave frozen for a million years, this idea initially seemed too implausible to carry out in a literal sense, a gesture beyond the means of anything Paterson might have been able to accomplish on her own. However, over the following three years and with the support



Figure 4. Cleared site of the *Future Library* forest. Photo © Björvika Utvikling by Kristin von Hirsch.

of Anne Beate Hovind, project director at Björvika Utvikling (and now Chair of the Future Library Trust), *Future Library* began to take shape. Paterson and Björvika Utvikling agreed that, beginning in 2014, every year for one hundred years an author would be invited to compose an original text to be kept unread until 2114. The city of Oslo donated an area of the Nordmarka forest on the city outskirts to serve as the location where a forest of trees would be planted. Working with foresters from the Agency for Urban Environment, in 2014 the existing trees were cleared and milled (Figure 4). Some of the felled trees were turned into wood pulp which would be used to print 1000 certificates of authenticity (Figure 5), entitling each owner to a complete set of the printed *Future Library* anthology after 2114. A portion of the wood from the felled trees was also set aside to be used in the construction of a chamber in the new Oslo Public Library in Björvika that will house and display the unread *Future Library* manuscripts. In May of 2014, in the cleared area of the forest, one thousand Norwegian Spruce trees were planted by Paterson and others (Figure 6). These trees are now growing and will continue to grow until 2114 when the last manuscript is completed. Then the trees will be felled, milled, pulped, and turned into the paper upon which the *Future Library* anthology will be printed and distributed.

To guarantee the permanence stipulated by the commission's brief – an undertaking that would invariably extend beyond the lifetime of all living stakeholders – Paterson drew up plans to establish a trust to secure the existence of *Future Library* for the entirety of its one-hundred-year duration. The Future Library Trust (“Stiftelsen Framtidsbibliotek”) was registered in January of 2015 in accordance with Norwegian law, through a Constitution (“Stiftelsdokument”) drafted and signed

by Paterson and Hovind. This document established various logistical aspects of the work's enactment and ringfenced certain rights over the work for the artist. In its Articles of Association, Paterson and Hovind outlined how the Trust would be overseen by a rotating directory board of five to eight individuals who would be elected by the existing board members every five years. The board is currently chaired by Hovind, and the Constitution stipulated that Paterson may hold office for her entire lifetime if she wishes. The Constitution also defined the Trust's primary purpose: to secure the existence (“å sikre eksistensen”) and safeguard or care for (“å ivareta”) the artwork for “a period of over 100 years, from 2014 to 2120,” anticipating that while growing the trees and collecting manuscripts would take a century, the Trust may still be necessary after 2114 in order to oversee the printing and distribution of the texts.

In this document, the artwork's nine constitutive “elements” were also delineated. These were defined as: the Future Library Trust; the designated area of forest in Nordmarka where the one thousand trees had been planted; one hundred contributing authors; their one hundred unread original texts; a specially-designed room to house the manuscripts in the new Deichmanske Library in Björvika; an annual public program connected to the selected author and text; a limited edition of one thousand certificates made by the artist to support the foundation's mission; the printed anthology of books “printed on paper made from the trees in the forest to be cut in 2114”; and a Declaration of Management (“Erklæring om forvaltning”), defined as

the set of guidelines written by the Artist, which expresses the Artist's intention for the *Future Library*, and which the Foundation shall, in its best ability, follow in its management and preservation of the *Future Library* for the 100 years the project will last.

In the fall of 2014 Canadian writer Margaret Atwood was announced as the inaugural author, and in late May the following year – in a public event held amongst the *Future Library* saplings in the Nordmarka forest – Atwood presented her sealed manuscript and announced its title, *Scribbler Moon* (Figure 7). The weather that day was chilly and damp, and participants who had made the pilgrimage through the forest to the ceremony amongst the saplings were greeted with hot coffee, brewed over a fire tended by the foresters. Words were spoken by Hovind, Paterson, and Atwood, and then the manuscript – sealed in an archival box tied with a purple ribbon – was presented to the Vice Mayor of Oslo.

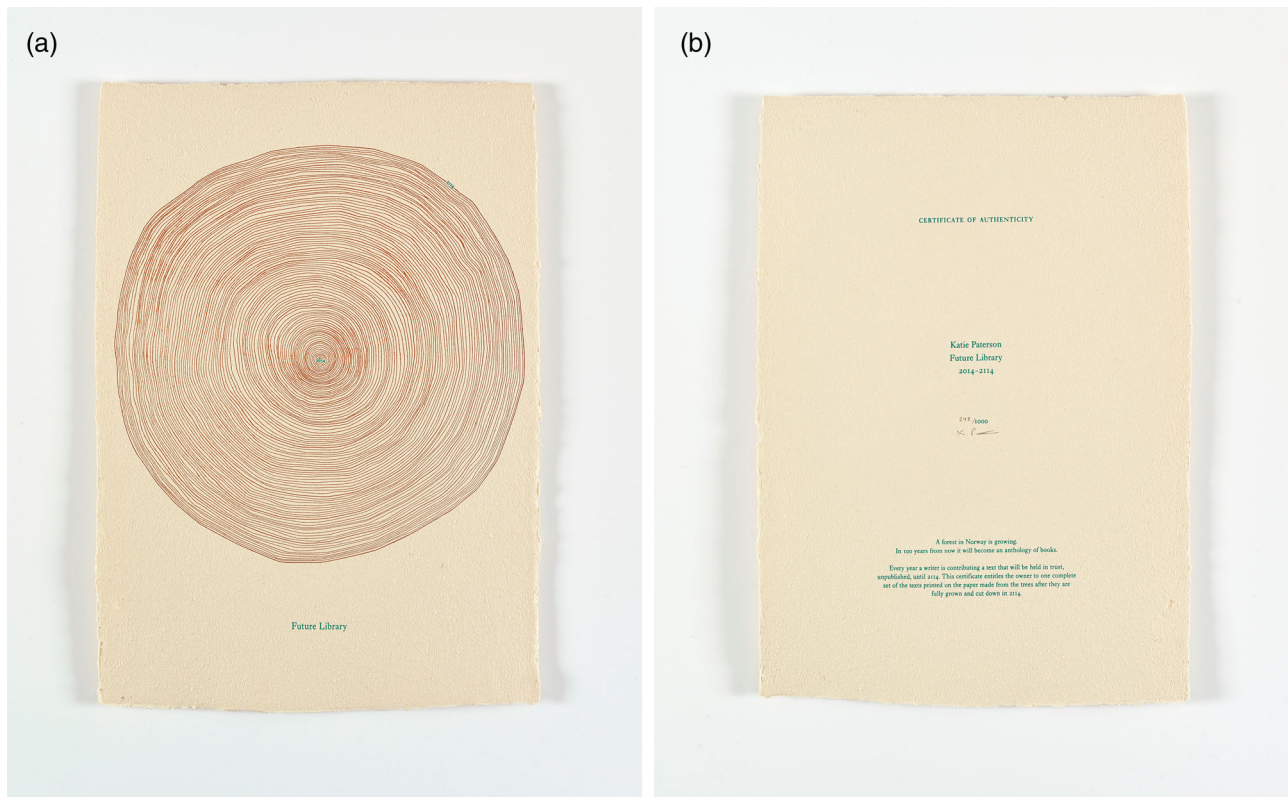


Figure 5. Recto (a) and verso (b) of a *Future Library* certificate. Photos © John McKenzie 2015.



Figure 6. One of the *Future Library* saplings in Nordmarka. Photo © Bjørnvika Utvikling by Kristin von Hirsch.

Since then, four more Handover Ceremonies following a similar format have taken place. In 2016 English novelist David Mitchell presented his manuscript titled “*From Me Flows What You Call Time*,” in 2017, Icelandic author Sjón handed over his manuscript “*As My Brow Brushes On The Tunics Of Angels or The Drop Tower, the Roller Coaster, the Whirling Cups and other Instruments of Worship from the Post-Industrial Age*,” in 2018, Turkish novelist Elif Shafak presented her manuscript titled “*The Last Taboo*” (Figure 8); and in June of 2019, South Korean writer Han Kang handed



Figure 7. Katie Paterson (left) with author Margaret Atwood (center) and her sealed manuscript *Scribbler Moon* at the inaugural *Future Library* Handover Ceremony in 2015. Photo © Bjørnvika Utvikling by Kristin von Hirsch.

over her manuscript “*Dear Son, My Beloved*” (Figure 9 (a–d)), swaddled in a white cloth that she dragged across the forest floor during the procession to the site of the *Future Library* forest.

These manuscripts are currently stored on a shelf in the Oslo City Archives. Following the completion of the new Oslo Public Library in Bjørnvika the manuscripts will be held in a dedicated room – referred to as the Silent Room – on an upper level of the library open to



Figure 8. Attendees of the Handover Ceremony in 2018 gathered amongst the *Future Library* saplings. Photo © Björvika Utvikling by Kristin von Hirsch.

the visiting public. For the last five years, architects from Atelier Oslo and Lund Hagem have been designing and constructing this space in consultation with Paterson and the rest of the Trust and it is set to open to the public in 2022. The undulating walls and ceiling of this darkened space will be completely lined with strips of wood from the trees felled in 2014, punctuated by one hundred glass-fronted drawers, one for each of the hundred manuscripts.

4. Manifesting *Future library*

4.1. Instantiation

Instantiation is typically conceived of as a process whereby a work of art is made fully present in a discrete



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 9. (a) Author Han Kang leading the procession to the site of the *Future Library* forest in 2019. (b) Kang wrapping her manuscript during the Handover Ceremony in 2019. Photos © Björvika Utvikling by Kristin von Hirsch. (c) Kang presenting her manuscript to artist Katie Paterson, flanked by the Chair of the Future Library Trust, Anne Beate Hovind (left), and the Mayor of Oslo, Marianne Borgen (right). (d) The Mayor of Oslo, Marianne Borgen, holding Han Kang's manuscript "*Dear Son, My Beloved*" following the 2019 Handover Ceremony. Photos 9c and 9d courtesy the author.

episode of materialization, for example in the physical object associated with a painting, the exhibition of a multi-channel video installation, or the enactment of a performance artwork (see Davies 2010; Irvin 2013). Existing conservation frameworks tend to regard the material artifact or formal gallery presentations as the primary time and place in which an artwork is made present to audiences and around which an artwork undergoes iteration (see Phillips 2015).

From 2014 to 2114, *Future Library*'s various parts or elements have been and will continue to be materialized in different ways and at different points. It is impossible to identify an instance of the work comparable to the discrete, formal manifestations of a conventional gallery artwork. Between 2015 and 2114, one hundred instances of the annual Handover Ceremony will occur. Might these be considered manifestations of the work or simply manifestations of one *element* of the work? Are the sealed, unread manuscripts manifestations of the work or only a part of the work? Or, alternatively, is the work not fully executed until 2114, and, accordingly, should the unsealing and printing of the surviving texts be thought of as a singular manifestation, one that will take one hundred years to enact?

As we can see, where and when a manifestation of an artwork like *Future Library* ends and begins is unclear. How then might the notion of instantiation be supplemented to accommodate the diverse means through which artworks may be made present and may be subjected to change?

4.2. The virtual and the actual

Building upon Henri Bergson's theory of the virtual, philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) wrote extensively in *Difference and Repetition* about how objects, including artworks, have a "virtual" dimensionality that is of equal importance to the "actual" properties or features that are immediately visible and tangible. Deleuze emphasized how there are certain relational and morphogenetic elements of an object which may not be detectable or visible but are, nevertheless, just as real as the material aspects of any given object. In what follows I consider how a Deleuzian framework is more capacious and accommodating of the varied ways through which works of art and other objects of cultural heritage are made present to audiences and undergo change. By recognizing the diverse and partial ways through which these entities are actualized, the variety of processes occurring in a plane of actuality that may produce change in their virtual dimensions, and situating these processes on equal footing, we will see how the role

and the attention of the conservator might also be expanded.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze explains how an object's virtuality and actuality are both part of the object, "as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension" ([1968] 1994, 209). Deleuze also explains specifically how the "reality" of an entity such as a work of art is both actual and virtual, and a work of art exists as something more than its spatiotemporal occurrence(s), instantiation(s), or materialization(s) in a plane of actuality:

When it is claimed that works of art are immersed in a virtuality, what is being invoked is not some confused determination but the completely determined structure formed by its genetic differential elements, its 'virtual' or 'embryonic' elements. The elements, varieties of relations and singular points coexist in the work or the object, in the virtual part of the work or object, without it being possible to designate a point of view privileged over others, a center which would unify the other centers. ([1968] 1994, 208)

In his description of the underlying virtual structure of a work of art, Deleuze rejects the idea that such a structure might be governed by a singular, unifying center that dictates its identity and predetermines how it might be actualized. For Deleuze, there are relational aspects of things – including artworks – that do not exist actualized in time and space and are instead subsumed within what André Lepecki has described as the "virtual cloud" that surrounds a work (2010, 45). This very real part of a work of art does not exist in isolation from the activities or encounters that occur in time and space. Rather, it is constantly acted upon in a plane of actuality and in a circuit of what Deleuze ([1968] 1994, 208–14) terms "reciprocal determination" between a work's virtual and actual dimensions.

Although changes to a work of art at the level of the virtual may be more concentrated around episodes of exhibition, this reciprocal determination occurs not only when the work is materially present, e.g., during episodes of gallery display or enactment of a performance artwork. Reciprocal determination also takes place when the work is absent as a spatiotemporal object or event, for example in moments of a work's un-exhibited "dormant" state (Lawson, Finbow, and Marçal 2019, 1), in interviews with an artist, in revisions to installation parameters or the development of new "versions" or "presentation modes" of a work, and in discourse on or about the work.³ In a Deleuzian framework these changes may be understood as *differentiation* within a plane of actuality that produces *differentiation* at the level of the virtual.

Deleuze ([1968] 1994, 207) states: “We call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea differentiation; we call the actualization of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts differentiation”. James Williams, in his writing on Deleuze, explains that “the re-arrangements of the syntheses at the level of the virtual object are of a different order from the causal relations at the level of actual object,” and that while determination moves in both directions, reciprocally, it is not symmetrical. Additionally, he notes that the changes induced in the structures of the virtual remain hidden and latent, known only when “played out again at the level of the actual” ([2003] 2013, 116). Williams writes,

The actual can be grasped but it is incomplete—that is, we can be certain of it but only in terms of its actual side. The virtual cannot be grasped, only operated on, and the effects of this operation can only be grasped in the actual. ([2003] 2013, 116)

In a Deleuzian conceptual model, changes to a work of art or object of cultural heritage can be said to resonate in both its actual and virtual dimensions, but these changes are only perceptible at the level of the actual.

Whereas Hanna Hölling views the artwork’s archive as the source of a work’s “virtual potentialities” (2015, 86–87; see also 2017), I propose that each part of an artwork that we come to know and sense in a plane of actuality also has a virtual dimension and reality. This is to say that a work may be both actualized *through* and undergo change at the level of the virtual as a consequence of: the textualization of the artist’s sanctions and directives; the discourse surrounding a work, including artist interviews; the formal manifestations presented in a gallery setting; the supplementary artefacts and documents that may be produced; the memories that proceed from an individual’s experience of a work’s materializations; the rituals that surround a work’s perpetuation; and the new versions or subtypes that may be conceived and instantiated. In each and every one of these contexts and moments of actualization a work is not only made present and *differentiated*, but may also undergo *differentiation* in its virtual dimension as a consequence of activities occurring in a plane of actuality. The results of this differentiation may be perceptible in any and all of these other sites of actualization. This is not to say that the formal manifestation is irrelevant – indeed these manifestations are often at the heart of the artist’s concept and stipulations about how the work should be experienced and endure. Rather, I suggest that an artwork’s materialization in a physical object or its installation or enactment within a museum is

simply one of the many ways in which a work of art may be actualized, may be made present, and may undergo change.

4.3. Execution and implementation

Future Library contains a heterogeneous combination of modes of actualization. The fact that its various elemental parts materialize or re-materialize in different ways, at different rates, and at different points throughout its protracted duration poses significant challenges to conservation frameworks that presuppose a sharp discontinuity between a work’s execution and its implementation and regard a work to be actualized solely through one or more discrete objects or events occurring or recurring in time and space. It is tempting to argue that *Future Library*’s manifestation is textually stabilized by the specifications laid out in the Constitution of the Future Library Trust, which dictate the parameters by which the work should be enacted over the following century. Following this logic, its score was laid down in 2015 and all subsequent activities connected to the work are interpretative performances carried out in fulfillment of the work’s singular, hundred-year implementation, where the nine specified elements of *Future Library* function as component steps in a one-hundred-year process of instantiation.

If one were to therefore draw a sharp execution-implementation boundary at the point when the Articles of Association were drafted by Paterson and Hovind in 2015, other significant aspects of the work that have emerged since would fall outside the work’s creation stage. This would deny the possibility that new traditions or rituals introduced during its implementation might enter into its “core” as essential properties of the work. The continued emergence of significant aspects of the work – like the Handover Ceremony or the construction of the Silent Room – indicates that the work is continuing to unfold in a protracted state of creation; these are not simply interpretations of a thinly-specified score from 2015. Paterson’s ongoing role in shaping these elements together with the Trust is a departure from any direct analogies with a musician’s interpretative performance of a musical score.

With this in mind, one might look to identify a boundary between the work’s execution and implementation instead in 2114 when the texts will be revealed and printed, when its official duration will have drawn to a close and its creator will almost certainly be deceased. From this perspective, the artwork remains unfinished until 2114 and an experience of the finished artwork *Future Library* would not be possible until this point. However, this position rests on the premise that

the artwork is only realized and therefore experienced in the publication and revelation of the collected texts.

Interpreted literally, the artwork's three-line *idea* conceptually binds the work to the cells of the trees intended to form the material substrate of the printed books, and to the promise that the texts remain unread until 2114. Returning to this conceptual point of origin as an interpretive guide – read as, an early, minimally-specified score – it could be argued that the work is manifested by the unread books, growing in the collection of commissioned texts and the planted trees. One could even go as far as to say that in 2114 the work will in many ways be over, a notion perhaps underscored by the work's hyphenated date, "2014–2114." This does not, however, imply that the work will be dead at this point or that the only authentic *Future Library* is that which exists before 2114. Rather, this suggests that what will precede 2114 is of at least equal significance, and that the work is as much actualized now as it will be in or after 2114.

One may already see evidence of this in the popularity of the annual Handover Ceremony. Attendees – myself included – have not found the work to be something out of reach from contemporary audiences. Although the texts remain unread and inaccessible, the work is very much present, in all the activities that surround the yearly Handover Ceremonies, in the procession with the author and their sealed manuscript through the forest, in the clearing where the manuscript is handed over, in the planted saplings, and in the printed certificates which often stand as *Future Library* in gallery exhibitions of Paterson's work. These are all elements of the artwork that provide access to *Future Library*, an artwork that is partially present and also partially out of reach.

Archivist Kirsti Gulowsen, who is responsible for the interim care and storage of the *Future Library* manuscripts in the Oslo City Archives, recounted a particularly memorable request from a visitor, underscoring this point (Gulowsen, pers. interview with author, November 28, 2018):

There was an American lady who came to our reading room and said, "Do you actually keep the Margaret Atwood *Future Library* manuscript?" I was called for and I came down to the reading room, it was raining, it was November, and she was in Oslo for just two or three days, and she said "Could... could... could I just see the box?" "Yeah, sure." I went down and fetched the box in the storeroom and took it up to the reading room and I said, "This is the box." She started crying. And I said, "We can take it out of the box; we can't open Margaret Atwood's wrapping, but we can take it out of the grey, standard archival box." And as she was crying, she said, "Do you know what this is? Do you

know what this really is? This is freedom of speech, this is history, this is an artwork. I come from Trumpland and I can actually walk into an archive and ask to see this box and I'm actually holding Margaret Atwood's manuscript." She was so moved, she was beside herself. That was quite an experience. So somebody has already had a great artistic experience of a manuscript that hasn't been published yet.

This anecdote highlights just one of the many ways in which *Future Library* is made present and experienced. Although 95% of the texts have yet to be commissioned, handed over, printed, or read – existing only as a specification – the work is by no means unrealized, yet it does also remain partial and incomplete. As we have seen, the work's elements are actualized in the artist's intentions, textually expressed in the spare, abstract specification of Paterson's idea and in the slightly thicker *Declaration of Management*. Still, other elements have also begun to be actualized in their literal materializations: the growing forest, the texts written so far, the ceremonies held so far, and, very soon, the Silent Room. On their own, any of these aspects of *Future Library* might fit into conventional frameworks around instantiation if alone they represented the extent of the work's materialization. Considered with respect to all of its constitutive elements, however, *Future Library* cannot be said to be singularly manifested through just one element, nor a critical mass of several elements. The work may be made present through any one of these elements, each providing an auratic, albeit distinct, conduit to the artwork that is *Future Library*, while other elements remain physically absent: yet to be materialized or known only through memory and documentation.

4.4. Presence and absence

Tina Fiske (2009) has noted that textualization serves to tether an artwork in absentia, not only in the inevitable absence of the artist (the authoritative sanctioning force behind legitimate instances) but also in the inevitable physical absence of an artwork following its deinstallation. Indeed, the absence threatened by physical dissolution is omnipresent for every artwork or object, and the absence of past material or contextual configurations forever haunts contemporary circumstances. Further, the play between presence and absence occurs at a more granular level than the presence or absence of the artist or an artwork's materialized form. Not only are presence and absence asserted differentially between the discrete elements of an artwork, but also between the properties or features regarded as significant by an evaluator, which may or may not persist or recur in an entity's ongoing materialization(s) and enactment. The presence and absence of elements and

properties thus operate at multiple levels of abstraction within a plane of actuality. Although an element or property may be physically absent due to material alteration or substitution, its presence may be asserted instead through textualized intent and discourse that illuminates its significance.

At any given moment, all the elements of *Future Library* are actualized in some respect, some in articulated intentions or verbal directives, some in discrete events or assemblages in time and space, and others in memory. Some elements may be literally materialized and present for audiences while others remain absent and out of reach, intended and therefore real but not immediately tangible. All these intended elements are arguably essential – yet the work can and will forever be experienced with some of these elements physically absent. In this sense, the idea that *Future Library* is only experienced through the sum of all its physically manifested parts denies the possibility of an experience of the work *ever* occurring.

Access to the content of the *Future Library* texts is deferred to 2114; this is a part of the work hardly anyone living now is likely to experience. But similarly, something integral to the work will be lost in 2114 when the texts are no longer unread. The trees will be felled, the ceremonies complete, the experience of creating, collecting, and preserving its elements – so key to its concept – will become part of the work’s past and memory. A sense of loss, of absence, of fragment is, therefore, inscribed on the work forever, but *how* this loss is experienced will change over time.

Future Library’s many constituent elements and their various properties or features move in and out of materialization throughout the course of its existence. Absence, in this case, works in both temporal directions. The deferred presence of the texts – required to remain unread until 2114 for the work to *be* – results in a withholding of a part of the work from those living today. This absence is both a conceptual requirement and an aesthetic feature that has the effect of asserting the work’s presence *through* absence; the longing for and contemplation on the unread texts is integral to the experience of the work today. These and other intended but as-of-yet unmaterialized elements are present insofar as they are actualized in the artist’s verbal and textualized directives, and in an individual’s contemplation of their material absence. Looking ahead to a time after 2114 when the Handover Ceremonies will be finished, the trees felled, the unread manuscripts no longer a secret, parts of this work will also fade into absentia. These absent elements may persist instead through documentation, memory, and storytelling, in

“supplement” (Jones 1997) to the work’s other physically present or absent parts.

Where and when *Future Library* can be said to be instantiated is difficult to pinpoint. Its complete occurrence in fact seems forever deferred, with one or more parts always absent and out of reach at any given moment in its trajectory. In many ways the work is actualized and experienced through any one of its constituent parts or “atoms” (see Kania 2013, 207–8; Tillman 2011): the attendance of an official Handover Ceremony, or one’s private walk to the site of the planted forest; an encounter with the unread manuscripts in the Silent Room, or the reading of the printed books a century from now; the experience of listening to the stories or seeing pictures related to the work’s enactment, or the individual contemplation of Paterson’s idea from which the work first germinated. Each could not be more different and yet the work, or a part of the work, is arguably recurring and made present in each instance. We can see, then, how each discrete element functions as a synecdoche, a part standing as the whole. In this way – and perhaps for all artworks – storytelling, documentation, memory, imagination, artefact, and ritual all function as conduits to an artwork whose presence is invariably inscribed with incompleteness, deferral, and absence.

5. Safeguarding *Future Library*

What then might conservation entail for a work that will continue to unfold over a century, and whose various elements extend beyond the climate-controlled walls of the library or museum? Included in the 2015 Handover Ceremony pamphlet – distributed in conjunction with Margaret Atwood’s Handover Ceremony – was an essay by Avre Rød titled “A New Spring.” In it, Rød speculated on the many eventualities that may befall the work, possibilities beyond the control of any of us:

Maybe the newly planted trees in Nordmarka forest will have long burnt down in one of the murderously dry summers we will have in thirty or fifty or eighty years. The trees could certainly be replaced with others, but then part of the artistic concept could disappear. (2015)

In the interview I conducted with her in 2017, Paterson reflected on the risks posed to the work’s continuation by the effects of climate change:

The fact that we have no idea what the planet’s going to be like in eighty years’ time—is the forest going to survive, you know? Is Norway, is Oslo as a city, what’s it going to be like then? Is a fjord going to take over the land?

... There's so much that we can control and think about but actually the majority of it is really beyond our control ... It's sort of letting go to that. And having trust. (Pater-son, pers. interview with author, July 4, 2017)

Hovind echoed Paterson's sentiment following the Handover Ceremony in 2018. She emphasized the importance of the rituals that have emerged around the work, an aspect whose significance she could not have understood or anticipated back in 2014 and which she felt could help ameliorate losses in the future:

I feel like the storytelling, the rituals will help us heal the wounds if that happens, will kind of compensate ... I think for me personally it's also about understanding the performative part of the work. I wouldn't be able to do that earlier because, I think, I really understand now the value of repeating. So that is another part, the rituals in the artwork. For me, I don't think I really would have understood. I think that is why the mayor said it is growing all the time, because I think these layers, you really don't understand before you have experienced them in a way ... I think that conservation in this work is even to understand the depth of rituals. (Hovind, pers. interview with author, June 2, 2018)

The fact that *Future Library* exists in so many parts in time and space leaves open the possibility that should the manuscripts be lost or the trees burned in a forest fire, the work's other elements – like its rituals – may hold a supplementary power, able to stand both in addition to and in place of the work's other parts. The same may in fact be said of the artwork's “delegated authorship” (Marçal 2017, 100) and collective stewardship; both are already shared and distributed among many parties, and its continuation and safeguarding will extend beyond the lifespans of the artist and those currently serving on the board of the Trust. Much has been set in place to secure the work's existence; however, a critical facet of *Future Library*'s continuation ultimately lies in the faith that the Trust, municipal agencies, a global public, and future generations take ownership over its safeguarding, help it to adapt to a changing world and find ways to “heal wounds” and ameliorate losses where necessary.

In *The Force Of Non-Violence: An Ethico-Political Bind*, cultural theorist Judith Butler highlights an important distinction between preservation and safeguarding with respect to vulnerable or persecuted groups. She writes:

Preserving seeks to secure the life that already is. Safeguarding secures and reproduces the conditions of becoming, of living, of futurity, where the content of that life, that living, can be neither prescribed nor predicted and where self-determination emerges as a potential. (2020, 94)

Butler's distinction regards preservation as an activity aimed at essentializing and fixing what someone or something is and has been up to the present. Read in the context of conservation, this recalls the classical “freeze-frame paradigm” (van Saaze 2013, 56–57), a prioritization of historical value where the entirety of an object's history is regarded as significant but only up to the present. Safeguarding on the other hand – in Butler's formulation – is regarded as an activity that secures certain conditions necessary for an entity to continue living a life, where the trajectories that life may take remain unknown; as Butler (2020, 100–101) puts it, “without that open future, a life is merely existing, but it is not living.” Rather than identifying and perpetuating a fixed constellation of essential properties, safeguarding requires an *ongoing* identification and securing of the conditions necessary for an object's deferred and accumulating parts to be made present, now and in the future. These conditions may continue to evolve and multiply as material and contextual circumstances shift and audiences change. Determining the conditions for a work of art's continuation must therefore be an open-ended, discursive process, one that lies not only within the conservator's ethical remit, but at the very heart of it.

6. Conclusion

Upon first glance, *Future Library* may appear too idiosyncratic to draw out any implications for contemporary art conservation or cultural heritage preservation more widely; it confounds conventional frameworks in many respects, but most artworks do not exist in so many disparate parts or operate at the physical and temporal scales that *Future Library* does – they fit in a room in a gallery and do not change much, or very quickly. Or do they? This is of course the illusion perpetuated by many museums, one where artworks are often presented like organisms frozen in amber. *Future Library*, while unique in many ways, illustrates how the physical objects made by artists, as well as the discrete episodes of a work's installation or enactment, may not be the only ways a work is actualized and experienced. Moreover, it reminds us as conservators that an entity's creation does not always have a fixed or clearly defined endpoint, and that there may be much more to it – and to its continuation – than its material fabric or the things installed or enacted inside the walls of the museum.

A rigorous reflection on the ontological complexity of a work like *Future Library* aids not only in elucidating the limits and blind spots of existing frameworks, but also in revealing the hidden processes that are otherwise

obscured by the perceived simplicity and straightforwardness of other supposedly “docile” artworks or objects of cultural heritage (Dominguez Rubio 2014). By seeing the diverse and partial ways in which *Future Library*’s presence is experienced and deferred, it challenges us to consider how any artwork or object of cultural heritage might similarly be engaged in a complex process of becoming, where parts are invariably absent even when the object appears present. Although these processes may be temporally compressed, protracted, or concealed from public view they are no less real. Just as traditional conservators are trained in close looking at physical artefacts, good stewardship also requires rigorous ontological interrogations of the entities in our care, with the understanding that their presence is not always asserted in obvious ways, and that what is absent may be just as meaningful.

The “ivareta” or safeguarding conceived for *Future Library* is not a rigid enforcement of a literal score where the work’s future remains completely predetermined with every eventuality anticipated. Rather, it is a stewardship that secures the possibility of the work’s becoming. In this way, the artwork may be seen as a metaphor for its own continuation: seeds have been planted, a forest is growing, and certain arrangements have been made to secure its futurity. Far from prescribing every direction that the organism should grow in – how it should behave and unfold – its safeguarding aims to secure the conditions for the artwork’s continuation, wherein its identity and significances may evolve, diverge, and multiply. Through a distributed, collective ownership, determining what such an artwork may require to continue having a future is a necessarily heuristic process.

Notes

1. The notion of “score compliance” with respect to the authenticity of contemporary artworks is discussed explicitly by Renée van de Vall (2015b), although the term originates in Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art* (1968, 117; 186–187) and is not common parlance in conservation literature. This article considers the limits of what Julian Dodd has termed “score compliance authenticity” ([2012] 2015, 485) as applied to manifestations of contemporary artworks.
2. This understanding of authenticity is derived from the Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems’ *Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System* (CCSD 2012), which defines authenticity as “The degree to which a person (or system) regards an object as what it is purported to be. Authenticity is judged on the basis of evidence” (CCSDS 2012, 9).
3. This is consonant with Amelia Jones’ (1997) discussion of the supplementarity of performance documentation, and Natalie Heinich’s comments on how – in the new

paradigm of contemporary art – “the discourse on the work is part of the work” (2014, 36–37).

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