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Introduction

PUSHING THE HORIZON

CONSERVATION AS a powerful value in our life on earth is probably the most overarching of the arguments I want to advance in this book. It connects the human experience with that of the nonhuman, and the human present with its past and future. When we conserve human-made things like objects or buildings, we also conserve the human memories associated with the tangible. When we talk about memory, we are proximate to history; and although history as practiced in universities does not much think about this "conservation-function," no conservator can avoid thinking about history, however anecdotally. Maybe there is something each could learn from the other's work?

Then there is the history of conservation itself, which in the twentieth century had one of its primal scenes in fascist Rome. The state adoption of conservation as a form of politics by other means reminds us that we can't simply view cultural heritage as an innocent category—it comes with a charge. Conservation itself, or preservation, is bound up with the beginning of modern politics in the seventeenth century. Getting to self-conservation or, more familiarly, self-*preservation*, required a massive shift in understanding the relationship between God and human agency. It's probably not something that most of us think of when we talk about conserving paintings or penguins, but this explosive charge lies buried deep within the history of the term's meaning. As conservation shapes thinking about politics, so it can thinking about individual action. Things that endure and the very category of the enduring can provide important guideposts for measuring human conduct. Acting in the world may require an ability to imagine a reality that does not yet exist. So, too, with the work of conservation, whether done by conservators, historians, philosophers, or anyone in the human sciences. For with imagination we can

restore—and we will conclude by wondering if restoration could be a much more capacious category than previously allowed and a more necessary one than recently admitted.

1. Terms

But first, what do we mean by the "human sciences"? On one level, it's simply the way the French say "humanities": *sciences humaines*. It was developed as a counterpart to the German *Geisteswissenschaften*. Both sound alien to our ears. The German term was coined by the historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey as a way of responding to the social prominence that had accrued, collectively, to the *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences). It is from this that we have our English talk about the "sciences" and the "humanities."[1]

Unlike all the other formulations, the French-originated "human sciences" makes plain, in a way that neither its German nor English equivalents do, that the object of these sciences is the human being. Talking about the human sciences of the object focuses on those approaches that work toward their target via the study of objects. Some do this all the time, like art history; others only some of the time, such as philosophy.

Having defined the term in my title, let me turn now to conservation itself. In 2008, the International Committee on Museums, after many years of discussion, produced a series of definitions. "Conservation" is the overarching category that embraces "all measures and actions aimed at safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility to both present and future generations." Specific approaches include "preventive conservation," which aims "at avoiding and minimizing future deterioration or loss," as well as "remedial conservation," which is about "arresting current damaging processes or reinforcing their structure" and is undertaken only in extremis. "Restoration" only can happen *after* there has been significant loss, and it is done to reestablish meaning that was otherwise lost.[2]

But "preservation," "conservation," and "restoration" are terms with long and complex histories. They may now have—or have been given—precise and separate definitions, but for much of their history they have not been used with such precision. It is, for example, only in English and German that a semantic distinction exists between "restoration" and "conservation"; in Romance languages, the same word is used for both. Similarly, it is only in English that a sharp line exists between curator and conservator; in French, for example, *conservateur* is the word used for "curator"—the one who cares for.

2. Memory

The running together of conservation and curation in care launches us toward our project of thinking of conservation as a *human* science: on human subjects and by human subjects (see chapter 6). Let us start, then, with what makes us especially human: memory. Anyone who has had the experience of watching a parent or older relative lose their memory does not need me to tell them that without our memory we are no longer truly ourselves. What is memory but the conservation of experience? Yes, it is more complicated than that, but at the edges only. If we are our memories, and memory is conservation, then are we—are our identities—not also a form of conservation?

Our nature as memory machines is mobilized in just this way in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Near the novel's end, we are introduced to a circle of people who have committed books to memory in order to preserve them from a dark age. "How many of you are there?" the main character asks. "Thousands," he is told, "bums on the outside, libraries inside. . . . We're nothing more than dust jackets for books." Thoreau's *Walden* is preserved in distributed form, chapter 1 in Green River, chapter 2 in Willow Farm, Maine. In one small Maryland town, the twenty-seven inhabitants shared out the complete essays of Bertrand Russell. "Pick up that town, almost, and flip the pages, so many pages to a person." And when the current dark age would eventually come to an end, a new renascence will mark the "download phase" of memory-as-conservation: "the books can be written again, the people will be called in, one by one, to recite what they know and we'll set it up in type."[3]

Aby Warburg's patron muse was Mnemosyne. He saw all of human culture as a function of memory. His life project could even have been called "Der Erhaltung der Antike," though, of course, he chose another word to communicate persistence over time. We know that he adapted a contemporary theory of mind that envisioned a physical registering of experience as memory—Richard Semon's theory of "engrammes" and "memes." But Warburg also came to intellectual maturity at the time of Wilhelm Ostwald's greatest influence. Warburg adapted Ostwald's theory of "energetics"—or at least its language—as the basis of a vast cultural theory that he described in terms of "energy transformation" (*transformatio energetica*) and the history of the "energy conserving symbol" (*Energiekonserve-Symbol*). His famous *Mnemosyne Atlas* could, from this perspective, be described as a history of the conservation of energy.[4]

There is an argument to be made about the relationship between conservation, the "social lives of things," and "collective memory." During the last

decade of Warburg's life, while he worked on the *Atlas*, Maurice Halbwachs was publishing his thinking about collective memory. Marc Bloch, in a review of Halbwachs's early work, described collective memory as "the conservation of memories common to a whole human group and their influence on the life of societies." He also made the point that collective memory is "constantly reconstructed starting from the present"—just as, we have come to learn, individual memory is reconstructed each time we remember a thing or event.[5] Jeffrey Barash has lucidly shown how Halbwachs's work on the dynamics of social memory, inspired as it was by Proust's recently published novel, in turn intervened in contemporary debates about the shape of history that culminated in the launching of the *Annales d'histoire économique* in 1929, the year of Warburg's death.[6] Just a year later, Fritz Saxl, who had taken over as director of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg, explained the institute's program as showing the ways in which knowledge of historical forms of transmission could be the key to the function of "the social memories of mankind."[7] From this perspective, historians are conservators as much as conservators are historians. But right now, only historians are writers. What might conservation look like as a written, not just researching, field?

Let us take Judith Schalansky's *An Inventory of Losses* (2018) as a possible model. The book is somehow both fiction that could be true *and* nonfiction that feels fictive. Its theme is loss—of the intangible, material, animal, vegetable, mineral—and the ways this impacts people. It is also, inevitably and dialectically, about the difficult work of saving, or trying to save, those things that are passing away—as well as the question of whether it is worth all that effort. It suggests that for things that have already passed out of hand, perhaps this kind of written account is the only kind of conservation we can have. It also implies that other literary works of the past hovering on the border between history and fiction, such as Jean d'Ormesson's *Glory of the Empire: A Novel, A History* (1974), could have been at least in part intended to make us think about the work of remembrance in just this way.

Right now, conservation, the "social lives of things," and "collective memory" are discursive spheres that rotate on their own axes without ever intersecting.[8] And yet, conservators are not only like archaeologists excavating down through layers of material traces in search of the life history of those things. They themselves, through their interventions, constitute another moment in that history, and they bring with them still other histories, other memories.

Neither Halbwachs nor Bloch could have known how brain research, then barely begun, might enrich the understanding of collective memory. But when

Danielle Bassett talks now about memory in terms of a sand pile, they are uniting these fields: this is thinking about memory as collective in a physical sense. When Bassett identifies some parts of the pile—the more crystalline pieces—as fixed and immutable, that refers only to some aspects of memory. Other parts of the pile—the less crystalline pieces—are constantly changing position, suggesting that this is how memory includes *change* in content.[9] Memory, both individual and collective, shares this same feature: every time we recall a memory we are changing some part of it. Gaston Bachelard suggests on this model a constantly re-creative role for memory work.[10] And this connects us just as directly with conservation. For every time a conservator treats an object or a historic preservationist restores a house or neighborhood, the act of saving is an act of changing. (And, paradoxically, just as a memory is conserved most perfectly, therefore, by *not* being remembered—and, thus, changed in the process—we might say that an object, too, might be best preserved—be left most authentically itself—by being left undisturbed in its long sleep.)

Once we are aware of the inevitability of change within the architecture of remembering, does it affect how we think about conservation? Should we really expect—*demand*—that conservation keep everything as it was? The brain researcher reading Bachelard today might add that remembering always includes loss or, to be more provocative still, forgetting. Should we, then, acknowledge forgetting as part of the work of conservation? And should this forgetting be acknowledged a priori or only a posteriori, as a kind of inevitable and to-be-lamented loss?

Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Funes il Memorioso" ("Funes the Memorious") speaks directly to this dimension of conservation's work. It tells the story of a character who is plagued by remembering everything. Borges presents it as a cautionary tale, and we can read it for what is at risk in a fully actualized cultural heritage machine. Applied to conservation, the story offers a dim vision of a kind of indiscriminate antiquarianism, not a historical science, which, by definition, selects and discards. The argument could be made, of course, that for those historians of the future to be able to select and discard, we need those antiquarians-conservators to have saved *everything*. On the other hand, this perspective reestablishes a hierarchy of the preparatory versus the perfected sciences and would, thus, fix conservation as a *Hilfswissenschaft*. And it would do this, in principle, for perpetuity, since for every present there would always be a future condemning it to a lifetime of deference.

Acknowledging this role of memory, we can identify what we could call the "conservation function" at work in many other very familiar realms—so

familiar, I would argue, that we do not even notice them: things like the naming of children or of streets. There is something going on here that isn't just about naming, the way we might pets or boats or racehorses. When we name our children or our streets, we are often engaged in very conscious acts of remembrance and "preservation-for."

This is what we are aware of because memory is accessible to us at almost every minute. But on the inside, invisible to us, we are also conservation machines. Ever since the discovery of DNA we have come to see how, at a molecular level, we are built for the intergenerational transmission of the information needed for life. And the human genome as a whole is a giant memory device. Very recent research in the area of epigenetics—which we might think of as the impact of experience on remembering—seems to show that change sometimes is not only the randomness of natural selection but is something that gets remembered in our genes and passed along to our genetic heirs.

We are also paying more attention to DNA's puzzling transmission of an enormous amount of data (paired sequences) that does not explicitly code for genetic function. The study of these "conserved noncoding elements" (CNE) is at its beginning, but it already reveals a whole new landscape of conservation studies. For in this part of our identity, we can find our genetic connection, both closer and more distant, to other species, both human and nonhuman. We may not know what, exactly, this betokens, but our connectedness has undeniably been conserved.[11] Even more, this unexpected conservation competency of DNA has been explored, intentionally, as a medium for preserving other kinds of information as well, such as digitized and then recoded video files. Put to work in this fashion, it functions a bit the way print functioned vis-à-vis manuscripts five hundred years ago: it serves the interest of conservation through massification. There now can be so many versions of a thing put into circulation—so the system itself becomes a kind of storage—that the chances of all of them disappearing or being eliminated are dramatically reduced.

3. History

Since the 1990s, conservators have paid more and more attention to their field's past.[12] A genealogy of conservation written by historians of history, however, would find its first recognizable ancestors in the Rome of the antiquarians. For Arnaldo Momigliano, writing about antiquarianism was about inserting it into the history of history. In his footsteps, we are now even more aware of a broad

ecosystem of antiquarians, especially in places like Rome, who excavated, studied, restored, and sold objects from the ancient world.[13]

The antiquarians were the first modern conservators, and the historical work done by them was bound up with their conservation work. That the literatures on historic preservation, objects conservation, and historical research all take their starting point in the work done by the same people suggests that there are good grounds for imagining that there is something common here to be disinterred.[14] Moreover, the fact that those antiquarians developed lines of research that later flowered as archaeology, anthropology, and art history suggests that recovering the antiquarian origins of conservation will be another way of anchoring conservation in the history of the human sciences from their earliest, embryonic, predisciplinary stage.[15]

Identifying the antiquarian origins of conservation practices also takes the history of restoration out of a teleology leading to the present practice of conservation—typically the kind of "history of" written by later practitioners of what that practice had become—and anchors it in a much broader history of knowledge production. For instance, the motto in bold letters placed by either Maarten van Heemskerck or Hermanus Posthumus, depending on attribution, above a drawing of ruins on the Palatine Hill in Rome circa 1535 (fig. 2) speaks to and for all those who want to study the past through its material remains: "Roma Quanta Fuit Ipsa Ruina Docet"—"How great Rome was, its own ruins teach."

Roman antiquarians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries excavated and restored works of art.[16] By the middle of the seventeenth century, enough knowledge had already come together to create a manual of practice. "It is no thing of mediocre genius, as others believe," wrote Orfeo Boselli in the 1650s in the first text communicating the theory and methods of restoration. To do it well, he continued, requires, first, "researching the knowledge of the ancient statue," and second, a talent for technique.[17]

Orietta Rossi Pinelli explains that the development of an intellectually powerful antiquarianism around the time of Johann Joachim Winckelmann shaped the work of his protégés, Bartolomeo Cavaceppi and Vincenzo Pacetti.[18] There was intellectual power in the antiquaries' work—she identified it with the new archaeological science—suggesting that the prestige of the Roman antiquaries had rubbed off on the restorers who worked with them, so that by the beginning of the nineteenth century they were earning the same kind of money and rising in status from lowly artisan to respected professional.[19]

Nor is it surprising that restoration focused on remaking the human form, given the wider culture's anthropocentric bias. This kind of reconstruction was

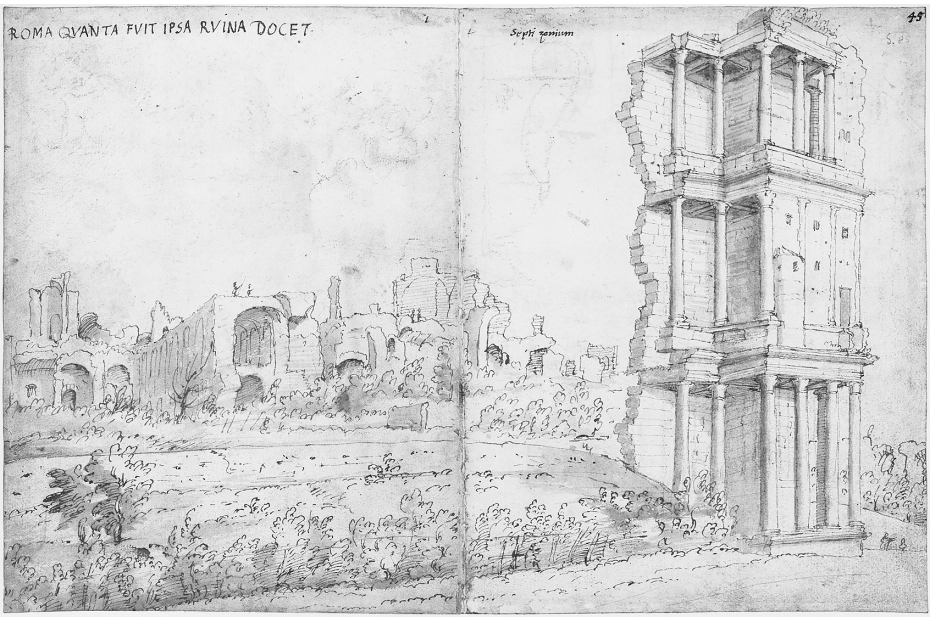

FIGURE 2. Maarten van Heemskerck, "Roma Quanta Fuit Ipsa Ruina Docet." Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin. bpk Bildagentur/Kupferstichkabinett/Staatliche Museen/Berlin/Photos by Jörg P. Anders and Volker-H. Schneider/Art Resource, NY.

on a continuum with the reconstruction of ancient Rome, which was also undertaken by the antiquaries. In both cases, restorers assembled pieces as best they could to make wholes out of parts—and where parts failed, out of learned imagination. The restoration of ancient sculpture has, in fact, long been a central focus of scholarship in the history of conservation.[20]

Rossi Pinelli argues that, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, the preference seems to have swung from restoring back toward conserving, at least in theory. A mass of scholarship has coalesced around key figures such as Cavaceppi and Giovanni Battista Piranesi.[21] The phenomenon driven by these individuals, as Salvatore Settis has shown, takes place against the backdrop of a long tradition of conservation laws in Italy. The papacy had established the office of "Commissario dell'antichità" as early as 1534 with the charge of preserving antiquities ("conservazione e riparazione"), but other cities, like Florence, developed this idea into laws aimed at restricting the wanton export of art objects to the harm of the local heritage. Napoleon's

depredations obviously stimulated a further legal insistence on conservation in place, but they also led philosophers such as Hegel (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, first published in German in 1821) to define public monuments as the public's property. All of this fed into very clear mid-nineteenth-century Italian laws about conservation in situ—clear enough, Settis argues, to have been the explicit inspiration for Theodore Roosevelt's later American preservationist campaign.[22] We can discern in this concern for the public also a recognition that conservation acts were for the benefit of those not yet born. Thus, Gifford Pinchot, who later would be the first head of the US Forest Service, described his task in the then-fashionable philosophical language of utilitarianism: "Conservation means the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time." Those last four words put conservation at the heart of democratic politics in a way that we have still not fully realized—there is no "Ministry for the Future."[23]

As practice crystallized in later nineteenth-century Italy, as is evidenced by the creation of the first modern "how-to" manual for conservation, Giovanni Secco-Suardo's *Manuale ragionato per la parte meccanica dell'arte del ristauratore dei dipinti* (1866), the weight of future judgment came to regulate conduct in the present.[24] Hence the declaration of the leading Italian conservator, Camillo Boito, in 1884 that all restorations should be removed and "thrown away."[25] Every "excess in restoration," he proclaimed, "becomes a falsification of documents."[26]

The history of thinking about whether or not to restore ancient fragments such as the Belvedere Torso, like the history of conservation more broadly, is a part of the discipline's developing self-consciousness. Some of the more recent histories of conservation have actually focused their work through this lens.[27] Living with fragments *could* reflect an ability to live with objects as they have lived, whereas restoring them to their putatively original state gives, instead, primacy to the moment of their creation.

Which leads me to a type of explanation that makes me a little uncomfortable, but which nevertheless can't be ignored. The nineteenth century was perceived at the time as a period of extraordinary change. It is not surprising that in response to all the many claims of "progress," there were those who felt that something essential was being lost. William Morris comes to mind, but so does Thomas Hardy, an architect who did historic preservation before he returned to his native Dorset and wrote novels that were themselves a form of historic preservation—and also poems, like "The Self-Unseeing," that did with lives what the conservation of things could not.[28] The rise of conservation as

a field must be connected to the sense of rapid loss. Is this true of other periods in human history as well? Or of other cultures than Europe? More work is necessary before we can conclude that there is a rule of thumb to be postulated.

One new theme in our era's history of conservation is a focus on the beginnings of scientific analysis of art objects.[29] Another is the production of institutional histories. I have in mind the monograph-length book on the Straus Center for Conservation at the Fogg Museum (of the Harvard Art Museums).[30] Still another is the ongoing attention, especially in Italy, to Cesare Brandi, who directed the Istituto Centrale del Restauro for its first two decades of existence. Attempts to understand his work and context have delved into his wider oeuvre, but also his institutional work.[31]

4. Modern Conservation and Fascist Italy

One of the contexts in which Cesare Brandi has been placed is that of broader Italian cultural politics in the 1930s. Brandi was appointed the first director of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro (ICR) when it was founded in 1939. The circumstances of its founding, and the role of Brandi's friend Giulio Carlo Argan, have been explored by historians of conservation as a way of understanding the contribution of the two men to the modern history of conservation. In this way, it has often been noted that the institute, and their role in its early years—Argan for articulating its raison d'être, Brandi for producing its theory—was connected to the work of Giuseppe Bottai, a journalist turned cultural-politician who rose to greater and greater prominence within the fascist state apparatus in the 1930s, culminating in his appointment as minister of education in 1936. Bottai himself has been the subject of biographical treatment, and his significance is beyond dispute. There has also been some noting that after the racial laws were implemented in 1938, he adopted a strongly Germanophile—read antisemitic—position. It was under his auspices that the ICR was created. Administrators—seemingly in all fields—are rarely treated as intellectual figures worthy of close reading, and so while Bottai's political writings have been published, they have not been read by historians of conservation for what they can tell us about the history of conservation. Up to now, those interested in the history of conservation have not taken Bottai seriously as more than just a political functionary facilitating the work of Brandi and Argan. In fact, things are more complicated, and Bottai's role far more significant.

What comes across in his speeches and short essays is a commitment to the centralization of all aspects of culture behind the state. While "even the war of arms has its laboratories of pure science where study and research develop dissociated from every immediate, practical application," he nevertheless disparaged the sterile abstraction of "culture for its own sake."[32] "The task of the Fascist institutes of culture is defined precisely in this translation into action."[33] In 1933, he talked about the role of these institutes in arming the state for combat, with ideas standing in for bullets.[34] In 1938, as war approached, Bottai proclaimed: "Art is not only not apolitical (ahistorical, produced by the freest creative fantasy) but is conceivable only as a product of politics (history)."[35] And if "the concept of 'race'" was the most "decisively and intransigently modern," and thus "the ideal content of Italian civilization," then no one could deny that it was necessary to explore "the problem of race in its relationship to art."[36] There were those who saw a threat to Italian culture in much of the contemporary art world—cubism, surrealism, and "International Jewry" (*ebraismo internazionale*). He did not feel the latter a real threat, because "Jewry, devoid of its own artistic tradition, and reduced to distilling intellectualistically the residue of what is others', certainly cannot dry up the creative sources of the race."[37] Only the state, he wrote in 1939, was in a position to guarantee, a priori and permanently, "the aesthetic and historical quality of artistic facts."[38]

Writing about his work with Argan to create new cultural heritage legislation, Bottai proclaimed that "the Fascist State, in conformity with the principles that inform it, not only cannot be disinterested in [Italy's] artistic and historical patrimony . . . but must properly protect it with ever more vigilant and diligent care." The existing set of laws did not address the care of objects.[39] He allowed that the existing "discipline of conservation, integrity, and security of things" ("la disciplina della conservazione, integrità e sicurezza delle cose") would be enhanced by the new law.[40] He presented the legislation as the most "organic" in Europe and a "triumph" over "the liberal fetishism of individual rights."[41] It was in this context that Bottai saw the founding of the ICR as creating a single "constant and univocal, normative" pole and pushing the technical problems of restoration and conservation toward a unified practice.[42]

In an interview published in the last week of August 1939, Bottai was even more clear. "L'Istituto Centrale del Restauro, willed by the Duce, is the very heart of the administration of the Belle Arti: a center of study, a center of research, a center of experiments, a center of production, a school of advanced method." The ICR would be able to take on delicate problems such as cleaning,

consolidation, and varnishing of paintings, which ought not "be left to the arbitrariness and empiricism" of the restorer. "It was about time that there arose in Italy an institute in which conservation goes from being a magical operation to becoming exclusively a work of critique."[43] Bottai was at pains to be clear about this. "Let me explain to you," he continued, "restoration is not remaking. Restoration must secure only the conservation and the letter of the authentic parts of a work of art. . . . The restorer is neither a magician nor an artist."[44]

Speaking at the opening of the ICR in October 1941, Bottai began by declaring that with its inauguration "a very important stage in the integrity of our artistic patrimony was, finally, completed." Again invoking the "will of the Duce," Bottai acknowledged that the institute "found itself born in difficult times. And yet," he continued, "in these times of hard war, an organism like this is not anachronistic, because [it is] directing its activity to save that glorious artistic patrimony that represents such a fundamental part of Italian civilization, and in this work of protection and conservation, it, too, fights its war: a war against empiricism, carelessness, dilettantism, equally causes of irremediable losses of works of art."[45] The institute's work was a kind of war. Its battle was Italy's, and it opened its doors "[i]n a moment like this, in which Italy spends its greatest and bloody force to conquer for itself in the world a place of influence deserved by its mature civilization." For Bottai, this moment was the fulfillment of "the directive that the Duce imparted to me for the realization of the Regime's artistic policy."

Turning more specifically to the work of the ICR, Bottai invoked the phrase "work of conservation" (*opera di conservazione*) three times in a single sentence. Bottai insisted that the ICR would inaugurate a new epoch in the history of care and repair against those who "continue to think about restoration not as a work of conservation, but as a repristination, as a remaking, as a modern integration."[46] As if in a line descending directly from Arrigo Boito, Bottai argued that a damaged work made new "is falsified and is destroyed," in just the same way that one might fake a historical document or an artwork. "Restoration is not repristination," Bottai declared. "It is uniquely, and only, conservation."

The ethics of conserving led Bottai to connect more explicitly conservation to history. There being "no fountain of youth" for humans or the work of their hands, what fell to humans was the obligation "to conserve the monuments of the spirit." "And just as the historian cannot invent documents or integrate them at his pleasure, so the restorer cannot substitute with fantasies the document, however damaged, that tradition consigns to him." Bottai grounded the

ethic of conservation on the model of "stringent philological researches" into the work of art as a historical document. It was for this very reason that the ICR was to be led by a historian and not a conservator. He specified that it was to be a certain kind of historian—he used the word "critical"; we might say "philosophical"—who was capable of evaluating the often divergent claims of history, the object, and time when deciding on a plan of care.[47]

I have spent so much time on Bottai to make the point that modern thinking about conservation did not begin with Cesare Brandi. And it did not begin with the opening of the ICR. Nor did it begin with Argan's draft charter for cultural heritage. It began with Bottai's centralizing vision of art for a fascist state at war.

We need to consider the extent to which the discipline of conservation was shaped by a strongly nationalist imperative. I'm not talking about the restoration of individual pieces of art, nor of individual conservators. I am talking about the shape of the field as it is inherited by us. To put a fine point on it, if the state saw culture as politics and invested in the creation of a theory of cultural heritage that put the state at its center, and if that state was a fascist state, do we not face the situation that today's cultural heritage theory—from the Italian cultural heritage laws of 1939 and 1943 to the Venice Charter of 1964 to the Nara Declaration of 1994—is ineluctably tied to a view of state hegemony that is, to say the least, disquieting?

If we are disquieted by this, then we might be moved to take the next step, which would be to recenter conservation thinking. I will suggest that this is another purpose of presenting conservation as a human science—for now human stands opposed to state. It is about the humans who conserve, and the human lives we can access through conservation, not the objects belonging to the "state" or the "culture" or the "race" that are being conserved.[48]

There is also a relation between the appropriation of culture by a self-aggrandizing state—and all states are self-aggrandizing to one extent or another; the fascist variety just represents an extreme version—and a focus on an object at its moment of creation and not as it lives in the ground. That moment of creation can so easily be identified, whether mythologically or scientifically, with a singular person, people, place, and time. It can then be used to feed notions of greatness and national pride. The object in the ground, by contrast, is a plaything of fate. Its past glory no longer matters. Its past life no longer matters. It may turn up again tens or hundreds or thousands of years later in a world speaking different languages, worshipping different gods, and organized into different tribes. The life of an object—its real conservation

history—stands as a firm admonishment to vainglorious politicians and pumped-up identitarians of all sorts.

Up to now, I would argue, most histories of conservation are not history, but genealogy. They are backward-looking travel to the origin of the present. But I submit that we will never really understand what conservation could be if we start by thinking we already know what it is. Instead of rushing to a desired conclusion, we need to tolerate some risk: some things of interest may not feed into our present; other things that have long been ignored may all of a sudden seem more important.

5. Politics

For Bottai and Mussolini, conservation was political because it served the agenda of national pride. But conservation is also a kind of politics. For we share memories, and in the sharing, we connect ourselves to others, just as our individual memories connect our present selves to our past selves. The sharing could be with family or, at a greater remove, with tribe, townspeople, city, or even polity (although as we increase the size of the collective, we decrease the content of what can be shared).

Turned around, this makes politics a place where conservation happens. Indeed, Roman coins were often stamped with different takes on "Conservator"—of the gods especially preferred by a given emperor, and thus Conservator Jupiter, Apollo, Neptune, Hercules, and so on. But it was also reflexive, referring to the emperors themselves, and thus the Conservator Pietatis coins of Gallienus, or Conservator Salutis, -Patriae, -Urbis Suae, -Africae, -Karthaginis, -Exercituum, and so on of other emperors. Caracalla, for example, was proclaimed "conservator semper vitae et dignitatis."[49] A similar range of references turns around the term *Restitutor*, or "Restorer."[50]

Seven hundred years ago, the people who created one of the first municipal governments in Europe—in Rome, of course—called them the Conservatores, and their official residence the Palazzo dei Conservatori, which remains on the Capitoline Hill. A few years before its final restoration at the hands of Michelangelo, Machiavelli advised future princes that their primary goal was "to maintain their state"—still another way of talking about conservation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau built his basic insight about "self-love" on the foundation of conservation. "Since each man is specially entrusted with his own preservation," Rousseau wrote, "the first and most important of his cares is and ought to be to watch over it constantly."[51]

A few years later, Edmund Burke looked across the English Channel at a France on fire and identified two related principles of "conservation and correction." "A state without the means of some change," he proclaimed, "is without the means of its conservation." And without the means to change, it might be unable "to preserve" even those parts it wished to preserve. The "people" was an object of a government's "conservation," property was an object of conservation, the civil order was an object of conservation. Meanwhile, the words "preserve" and "preservation" appear fifty-one times in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, focusing on the preservation of "rights," "liberty," "parliament," "spirit," "the monarchy," and the "constitution."[52]

But conservation in politics goes much deeper than Burke and the sources of modern-day "conservatism." For, and this is the purpose of the next few pages, I want to make clear that conservation needs to be taken seriously as a central component of the political thought of the modern age. When Thomas Hobbes framed his argument about government emerging out of the natural right all humans have for self-*preservation*, he helped create a language of politics that we are still speaking:

> The RIGHT OF NATURE, which Writers commonly call *Jus Naturale*, is the Liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own Nature; this is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgment, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.[53]

It would be reductive history, though not inaccurate history, to discern some kind of high road of self-preservation running through the modern theory of natural law—from Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) to the other great names, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704), Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694), Emmerich de Vattel (1714–1767), and on to the American and French Declarations of Independence and the Rights of Man. There is no denying the importance of that story in the development of modern political thought, but there is a more subtle tale to be told that helpfully anchors this history of political thought in a broader intellectual history. This story, told by Hans Blumenberg in 1969 in an essay with the fully ambivalent title keyword "Selbst-Erhaltung"—which can just as plausibly be translated as self-preservation or self-conservation—makes it easier to talk about conserving objects and conserving lives in the same sentence.

Tracie Matysik has suggested that Blumenberg's motivation in writing this essay, which appeared three years after his epochal *Legitimacy of the Modern*

Age and can with justice be treated as an appendix to that essay, was to rebut Max Horkheimer's 1941 claim that the general pursuit of self-preservation leads to self-destruction. It followed from this that reason could not be associated with self-preservation and, by extension, that enlightenment could produce mutual destruction (the kernel of what a few years later became Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). Blumenberg's argument, by sidestepping Hobbes in favor of Spinoza and giving a full account of his revolutionary position vis-à-vis medieval philosophy, advocates the centrality of a self-preservation that insulates reason from Horkheimer's dialectical attack.

Blumenberg's point is that, circa 1600, a medieval view of conservation as something done to us by God still prevailed. Thus, Tommaso Campanella could declare that "[c]onservation is, therefore, the highest good of all things."[54] But this was something taken care of by an all-loving God "Who gives us being and conserves and can perpetuate us." This is not quite self-preservation yet. Preservation is coming from the outside; it is a predicate of God, something intransitive, to use Blumenberg's language, and not something done by people. What is missing is the primacy of our self-regard, itself a function of our subjectivity.[55]

Blumenberg explains how the medieval approach to divine omnipotence had the effect of making conservation (of the world) an attribute of God. The greater the power to conserve, the greater the dependence of the world on God as its conservator. This same position reappeared most clearly in Descartes's concept of God as perfection. It implied that for man to preserve himself, he would also have to be perfect, which he isn't. "Therefore, I do not have the power of conserving myself." Hence "it is another being which conserves my existence."[56] Although a contemporary of such moderns as Peiresc and Hobbes, it is clear from Blumenberg's archaeology that on this point, at least, Descartes was an ancient (or at least a medieval). The future did not begin with him, but with Spinoza.

Like Newton, Blumenberg writes, Spinoza used the word *perseverare*, which still remains useful in the most general formulation of the principle of inertia: "The effect of every cause persists." Spinoza rejects "conservation" precisely because he wants to emphasize *human* agency and conservation still connotes something done *for us* is nothing other than the essence of the thing itself. As late as the first of the two articles on "Conservation" in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (vol. 4, 1754), it is still defined as something we need but can't fulfill ourselves. Self-preservation can only be ascribed to a being that is its own cause, and the only being that fits this category is still God.[57]

But the second article on "Conservation" presents it as a fundamental law of nature; as existence stands to other qualities, self-preservation is the thing without which everything else falls away. Morally, this means that "everyone should preserve his existence as long as possible—for himself, his friends, his relatives, for society and the human species." Diderot concludes by offering a non-Hobbesian but equally all-encompassing way of connecting self-preservation to social life: "Act such that all your actions tend toward the conservation of yourself and toward that of others. That is the cry of nature."[58]

Campanella's medieval *conservatio sui* became *self-preservation* in modern times; only the retrograde kept the old thinking alive. This is one of the reasons why we don't talk about self-conservation anymore, and why the foundational political role of conservation escapes us when we talk about objects conservation now. But the connection, preserved in language, goes very much deeper. Recovering the history has the effect of opening up a wider contemporary field of view.

As something of an afterthought, Diderot also includes "conservé" as an adjective, referring to a work of art or nature put away so as to protect it from the challenges of time and accident. "Thus, one says that a painting is well conserved when its colors have not changed . . . and that it is as pure as when it left its master's hand."[59] The *Encyclopédie* continues this insight, with seventeen variations on this theme, each of them referring to legal offices (judges, mostly) charged with taking care of, or being in charge of, a specific group of people or privileges.[60] This is not just antiquarianism. Via the English "conservator of the peace," itself a translation of the medieval "Custos Pacis" and Anglo-French "gardein de la pees," English and American law have maintained the category of "conservator of the peace," which includes police officers, judges, coroners, and all those who can uphold the law. "Conservatorships" in the United States describe guardian or protector roles established by the courts to manage the finances or daily affairs of people who, due to old age or incapacity, cannot manage themselves.

From the extreme edge of French revolutionary politics emerged a harder-edged language of power. Not preservation but force. Luigi Angeloni Frusinate's *On Force in Political Affairs* (1826), for example, used materialism to slice through accepted platitudes of social life: "[E]verything is force in the matters of the universe and therefore also in our politics here on earth." Natural rights like self-preservation he dismissed as mere words, while in fact "everything in the universe is governed by force." High-flown terms like "morality" and "natural rights" disconnected from force he dismissed as "totally absurd." What is

law, he asked "without the force that gives it value"? Without force, he wrote, "nothing could exist in the universe." "Every force was the aggregate of other forces," and lesser forces were always subdued by the greater. With everything in the universe as force, everything in the universe was in motion—active matter. Our body being matter, it, too, was an arena of forces, and their science, physiology, was a political science.[61]

Frusinate's materialism brings us to Marx's. Frusinate's dismissal of words in favor of force resonates with Marx's in favor of economics. At the very start of his exposition in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx explains that "[c]onservation [*Beibehaltung*] of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes." In other words, Marx characterizes the old regime's politico-economic forces in terms of conservation. It's what enables him to see that it is precisely a casting off of the constraints of conservation as the "constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation [that] distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones."[62]

But it is only as we get into the later Marx that something begins to change. It is, perhaps, precisely in his notion of "use value," where he does not use the term "conservation," that its fullest extent is actually most present. He describes the object, like DNA, as conserving within itself all its previous history. It is this that underpins his material perspective on the shape of history. In the first chapters of *Capital* (vol. 1), Marx sees the use value of a commodity as a way of thinking about that object as a thing that satisfies another person's needs. The "usefulness" follows, first, from "the physical properties of the commodity. . . . It is therefore the physical body of the commodity itself, for instance iron, corn, a diamond, which is the use value or useful thing."[63] But since most objects are made or transformed by men, that transforming labor is preserved in the object itself. And so, the outcome of the objects produced by men contains in it all that accumulated human effort. Wealth, or use value, is, therefore, according to Marx, "historical," since discovering and disinterring all of its impacted use value is "the work of history." (All this alongside, we might say, the object's natural history.) Marx describes history as "congealed," "embodied," and "materialized" in the commodity, though it would be as true, though less concrete, to say "conserved" or "preserved."

Later in *Capital* (vol. 1, chap. 24), when he talks about the "abstinence" of capital and the capitalist, he is helping us see the work of conservation in the world, though again without using the word.

> If the corn is not all eaten, but part of it also sown—abstinence of the capitalist. If the wine gets time to mature—abstinence of the capitalist. The capitalist robs his own self, whenever he "lends (!) the instruments of production to the labourer," that is, whenever by incorporating labour-power with them, he uses them to extract surplus-value out of that labour-power, instead of eating them up, steam-engines, cotton, railways, manure, horses, and all; or as the vulgar economist childishly puts it, instead of dissipating "their value" in luxuries and other articles of consumption.

Only at the end of this passage does Marx resort, through quotation, to a more familiar way of describing this. "Not only accumulation," he concludes, "but the simple 'conservation of a capital requires a constant effort to resist the temptation of consuming it.'"[64]

Finally, in volume 2 of *Capital*, Marx explains that commodities "are bought and sold at their values," so "all that is involved in these acts is the conversion of the same value from one form into another—from the commodity form into the money form, and from the money form into the commodity form—a change of state."[65]

The background presence of conservation in Marx is neither surprising nor coincidental. For it was in precisely these decades of the middle of the century that crucial developments in thermodynamics revolved around the idea of conservation. In 1842, Julius Robert von Mayer published the first of his theories about the "Conservation of Energy," and in 1847 Hermann von Helmholtz published his epoch-making *On the Conservation of Force* (*Über die Erhaltung der Kraft*). Emerging out of and then feeding back into a wider discourse on the conservation of energy and of momentum, Helmholtz's essay put the term "conservation" at the center of scientific research in chemistry, physics, and biology. It even shaped how people talked about the weather![66] I will return to Helmholtz in the next chapter, where I will show how the particular view of the matter whose conservation he advanced happened to feed into a dualist structure that has grounded professional conservation up to the present day. What he said about conservation—"The sum of the existing living and tensional forces is thus always constant"—is straightforward enough as to seem to need no further interpretation. And yet, if we go back to Leibniz, whose thinking about matter and motion was important for Helmholtz, we can see a way to talk about conservation that brings it into the heart of understanding the world around us. If "what is conserved is not in general *vis viva*, but rather the total of all motive forces," then conservation could be the basic principle

in the universe.[67] This was how Helmholtz's younger contemporary and antagonist Wilhelm Ostwald put it: "The law of the conservation of energy is certainly a tremendously general law; in fact, we do not yet know of a single phenomenon that is not subject to it."[68] Nor, even, does Marx's failure to use often the word "conservation" really matter; it was no less than Michael Faraday who believed "Conservation of Force" "the highest law in physical sciences," and who expressed its workings in terms of the "convertibility" of one type of force into another.[69]

What is interesting is that though the nature of Helmholtz's contribution has been recognized, and oceans of ink have been spilled on the question of why he used "force" and not "energy," no attention has actually been paid to what he understood by "conservation."[70] I am not going to enter into these debates, very much part of the history of science. But I do want to argue that they played a crucial role in shaping the treatment of conservation by Marx and Engels. Indeed, Anson Rabinbach and A. E. Wendling have actually talked about the "marriage of Marx and Helmholtz." Rabinbach has argued that "the most important 19th-century thinker to absorb the insights of thermodynamics was Marx, whose later work was influenced and perhaps even decisively shaped by the new image of work as 'labor power.'"[71] From their surviving materials, we know that Marx and Engels kept abreast of the work, and sometimes even attended the lectures, of the scientists at the heart of formulating the first and second laws of thermodynamics, including Helmholtz, Mayer, and Ludwig Boltzmann.[72] Marx's reading notes on thermodynamics and energetics began in 1851. Wendling even argues that it was a "thermodynamic model of labor" that led him past Hegel.[73]

But it is Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* (much of the manuscript seems to have been written between 1872 and 1882, with the introduction written in 1875–1876; it was first published in 1925 in the Soviet Union) that shows a full-fledged effort to understand the current state of scientific research so as to place social theory on the widest possible grounding. Helmholtz is all over this text, with Engels reading and quoting directly from his works, such as the *Populäre Wissenschaftliche Vorträge*. But it is not only Helmholtz. Engels has thrown himself into the entire literature on thermodynamics, using it to connect the dialectical method he and Marx had developed for social theorizing with the idea of work, or force.[74] J.B.S. Haldane, who in 1939 wrote the introduction to the English translation, grappled with the limitations of scientific knowledge that was then sixty years old. Einstein, too, when shown the manuscript in 1924, did not think it was of great scientific value.

But for our purpose, trying to catch the echoes of conservation thinking, Marx's and Engels's efforts to describe their work in Helmholtz's terms offer crucial evidence. "Physical energy, mechanical energy, heat, light, electricity, magnetism, indeed even so-called chemical energy, become transformed into one another under definite conditions without any loss of energy occurring." Engels uses the words "transformation," "transfer," "indestructibility," "conversion," and "reconversion" rather than "conservation"—that word only appears when he discusses the theories of Mayer and Helmholtz. And yet, it is clear that the use of all these many terms is a matter of trying to fill out the expansiveness of what is implied by the law of conservation.[75] Judith Schalansky, leaping across phyla of thought, connected Helmholtz's "law of energy conservation" with Freud's notion that no dream or passing notion is ever forgotten. Helmholtz's "principle of energy conservation" nevertheless, she insisted, was of limited applicability to most human things because it "fails to mention that most conversion processes are irreversible."[76]

6. Ethics

Marx and Engels worked at the level of abstract social process. After the catastrophe of World War II, Hannah Arendt developed the most elaborate theorizing of the power of the preservative on the individual scale. She pulls together much of what we have seen so far, offering a philosophical account of conservation (as opposed to an "ethics" of conserving, which is what is taught today to students in training programs) that *leads* to "Action." While the human condition is painfully transient, action "creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history." Arendt notes that labor, work, and action "are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world" for those who come after.[77]

Arendt writes that it was Herodotus who saw in the contrast between the transcendent gods of Asia and the human shape of the Greek gods the reality "that in a world of immortal nature and immortal gods, they were specifically mortal. That this was *the* human condition, not 'just' being a bipedal and having *logos*." The challenge of being mortal was not only to acknowledge our frailty; it was also—therefore—to strive against this to do things that merited "everlastingness." Herodotus's *Histories* was dedicated to celebrating those who did that, and he earned it for himself in the process.[78] One could say, with no exaggeration, that for Arendt, history was born as an act of conservation in order to establish conservation as a category of value.

Arendt also suggests that duration provides us with a scale for measuring that value. "The distinction," Arendt writes, "between a bread, whose 'life expectancy' in the world is hardly more than a day, and a table, which may easily survive generations of men, is certainly much more obvious and decisive than the difference between a baker and a carpenter." The inherent, or intended, durability of the thing made rather than the nature of the person making the thing shifts the ground of analysis to the matter of the thing-world. It's almost as if Arendt is expanding Alois Riegl's categories of analysis (intentional value, unintentional value, age value) to include "duration-value." This would describe things that are made to last as things, independent of any "message" (distinguishing this type of object from both an intentional monument as well as from the age value ascribed to things that have "happened" to last).

Products of action and speech are less tangible and even less durable—"they must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things—into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments." We could see all this as the work of Herodotus's children. And once turned into such things, "the whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality" upon being remembered. "Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfilment, and which makes it, indeed, as the Greeks held, the mother of all arts, the living activities of action, speech and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they had never been."

"Past-work" or, let us say, the work of preservation, thus becomes an essential element in human existence. And now, when Arendt talks about how "[t]he reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent" than ourselves, we realize that this permanence is actually, at least in part, also the work of humans.[79] And, we would add: this is where we recognize the historical function of conservation and the conservation function of history (see chapters 1 and 3 of this volume).

While Arendt acknowledges that all natural processes go to ruination and that, in addition, man-made things can be used up, she does believe that some things can be saved by people. "What usage wears out," Arendt writes, "is durability." "It is this durability which gives the things of the world their relative independence from men who produced and use them." Because the things of this world "have the function of stabilizing human life," we invest in their preservation in order to preserve something essential to us. The chair or table that

we conserve, we conserve so that "men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table." The "object-ivity" of the world, the fact that it is filled with objects we make, actually offers a fixed point, when aided by conservation, against the inevitable going-to-ruin of nature and culture.[80]

Arendt thought that art objects did special work stabilizing memory. "Among the things that give the human artifice the stability without which it could never be a reliable home for men are a number of objects which are strictly without any utility whatsoever." Works of art, she writes, are "the most intensely worldly of all tangible things." Arendt believed that objects had "outstanding permanence" because they were so little used and "almost untouched by the corroding effect of natural processes."[81]

Having laid the foundations, almost by accident, for a strong theory of the place of conservation in human life, we now need to help Arendt a bit in order for that theory to actually work. First of all, in positing that art objects can last because they do not get used up, she is only partly correct. Some works of art were intended as ephemeral. Others were used in such a way that wore out the object—think about furniture, or clothing, or tableware. It may be that Arendt was thinking too exclusively of paintings. Second, we know, and it was of course known in Arendt's time as well, that objects are still subject to "the corroding effect of natural processes."[82] Third, humans had to create institutions of preservation for this feature of the object-world to appear so clearly: institutions such as tomb, treasury, sacristy, and, of course, in more recent times, museum.

With these addenda and corrigenda, we can agree with her that "[n]owhere else does the sheer durability of the world of things appear in such purity and clarity, nowhere else therefore does this thing-world reveal itself so spectacularly as the non-mortal home for mortal beings."[83] And if the thing-world is our home, then conservation is at the heart of mortal experience.

Arendt sees the doing of great deeds and the speaking of great words—back to Herodotus again—as anchored in the making of things from which people derive "stability [that] will endure and outlast the ever-changing movement of their lives and actions." This will happen, however, "only in so much as it transcends both the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use."

Without those who can work with their hands as well as their heads—Arendt writes of artists, poets, historiographers, monument builders, and writers; we would add conservators—then the products of human existence, "the

story they enact and tell, would not survive at all." She concludes that things have to endure for the world "to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth."[84] We can, from here, close the loop: conservation is that thing that makes the world a fitting home for humans. While Arendt does not talk about nature or wildlife conservation, her argument works there as well, suggesting at least the promise of a "grand unified theory" of conservation.

Moreover, perhaps thinking about Marx and Adam Smith, if making things relieves humans "from the drudgery of the cycle of life processes" and produces "a world of durability," then the sustaining of the durable becomes essential for human well-being. This is also a value of conservation. Arendt talks about life in terms of "the predicament of irreversibility" and its "possible redemption." One of the paths toward redemption, Arendt writes, is "forgiving"—of being able to accept that unanticipated change happens. The other, the counterweight to unpredictability, is "the faculty to make and keep promises." She gives us here another way of thinking about the interdependence of history and conservation: as promisers. Both the historian and the conservator do work that keeps a promise of the past to the future; that things, and the works of humans, will endure.[85]

From forgiving and promising—the work of historians and conservators—Arendt comes to the politics of durability. She contrasts the plurality implied in action—that it always involves other people, with the focus on the isolated self she finds in Plato's politics. "The moral code, on the other hand, inferred from the faculties of forgiving and of making promises, rests on experiences which nobody ever has with himself, which, on the contrary, are entirely based on the presence of others." I would add, and I believe she would agree: "others" *as mediated through the things in which we leave our traces and that give us our durability*. As a model for politics, forgiving and promising—and being forgiven and being promised—describe a way of being together with others. But it is the objects of culture, both tangible and intangible, that provide the opportunities and the contexts for that being together. We might describe this as the real politics of conservation. Not whether or not or how much to clean, or what relative humidity to adopt as a standard, or what roof tile to employ. This is something much more essential: for Arendt, conservation creates the possibility for democratic politics. Without durability, which means without memory, tyrants, whether Plato's or those of Arendt's youth, can freely manipulate the human experience with devastating consequences.[86]

7. Imagination

Arendt doesn't talk about it, but if we look at her key terms, durability, redemption, promising, forgiving, all imply an ability to imagine a reality—specifically, a future reality—that does not yet exist. To fully realize the potential in Arendt's argument, therefore, we need to build out, not simply infer, a role for imagination.

On the surface, imagination might even seem inimical to conservation. Indeed, one of the roadblocks to including conservation as a worthy interlocutor to the human sciences is its consideration as a set of hand skills that are developed to remediate damage. On this way of thinking, the creative work went into the original making while the repair might be technically sophisticated but only re-creative. There was also the equally terrifying Charybdis of the too-creative conservator (viz., Boito's bugbear and Bottai's).

Either way, the conservator might have come into their own as a professional in the same nineteenth century that gave us our notion of artistic genius but was definitively placed outside that realm of genius. For what remains of this introductory chapter, I want to focus on the place of appropriate imagination in the work of conservation and then suggest how it could lead us to new ways of thinking not only about conservation, but also restoration.

Let me begin with another profession that came into being around the same time as conservation, the military officer, specifically the presentation of the military genius offered by Clausewitz in *On War* (1825). He explicitly identified imagination as a key feature of genius. It is notable that the specific example given has to do with spatial assessment.

> It is the faculty of *quickly and accurately grasping the topography* of any area which enables a man to find his way about at any time. Obviously, this is an act of the imagination. Things are perceived, of course partly by the naked eye and partly by the mind, which fills the gaps with guesswork based on learning and experience and thus constructs a whole out of the fragments that the eye can see; but if the whole is to be vividly present to the mind imprinted like a picture, like a map, upon the brain, without fading or blurring in detail, *it can only be achieved by the mental gift that we call imagination*. A poet or painter may be shocked to find that his Muse dominates these activities as well: to him it might seem odd to say that a young gamekeeper needs an unusually powerful imagination in order to be competent.[87]

The military leader's natural gift enabled him to "combine details into a clear coherent image." Again, the specific example was of three-dimensional knowledge. "His mind must hold a vivid picture of the road-network, the river-lines and the mountain ranges, without ever losing a sense of his immediate surroundings."[88] The genius who can re-create the three-dimensional from its parts as held in his head—the military genius framed by the Napoleonic Age—has the same talent as the ideal conservator as he was being modeled in Rome at the very same time.

For reassembling ancient sculptures was not simply a matter of putting the pieces of a puzzle together. First of all, the pieces usually didn't fit properly. Second, pieces were always missing. Third, there was no photograph on the box to tell the restorer what they were looking at to begin with. That may be why sculptural restoration served historians as such a potent metaphor for describing their work long after they had cut their ties to antiquarianism. To choose one example, in 1842, Jacob Burckhardt, the great Swiss historian of the Italian Renaissance and father of modern cultural history, explained in a letter to a friend: "What I reconstruct historically is not the fruit of critique or speculation, but rather of imagination which aspires to fill in gaps by intuition. History is for me, moreover, in large part, poetry." There is an important line opened here to the writing of fiction and to the historical novel in particular (see chapters 3 and 7 of this volume). Years later, in his *Cicerone* (1855), Burckhardt linked all this to sculpture restoration. "The observer has to develop in himself this faculty of restoration without which ancient ruins could only seem to him broken remains. . . . He must, upon viewing a fragment, divine the whole, learn to reconstitute it and not demand an immediate impression of remains whose beauty cannot be completed except by reflection."[89] Burckhardt's view of poetry as history finds its echo in Paul Ricoeur's notion of an "epistemological imagination" in which poetry functions as a means of discovery that parallels science.[90]

According to Rossi Pinelli, the turn to conservation in the earlier nineteenth century was related to the increasing acceptance of the fragment in itself. She locates this change in the practice of restorers within a broader history of taste that is peopled by figures such as Novalis, the Schlegel brothers, and the journal they edited, *Athenaeum*.[91] In contemporary Great Britain, we might think of John Soane's Museum. The fragment, as opposed to the aphorism, was something both broken and incomplete. It called attention to its own fracturedness.[92] The importance of the fragment in the nineteenth century—an externalist

narrative—cannot be separated from the internalist narrative about change in practitioners' preference from restoration to conservation.

Burckhardt reminds us that if conservators were changing their attitude to the fragment over the course of the nineteenth century, so, too, were historians. Alois Riegl had suggested, in his famous 1903 essay "The Modern Cult of Monuments," that the nineteenth century's fascination with the details of history reached its most perfect form in cultural history, which he describes as a study of "minutiae." "The new postulate," he explains, "resided in the conviction that even the smallest particular within a developmental chain was irreplaceable and that within this chain even objective value adhered to objects wherein the material, manufacture, and purpose were otherwise negligible."[93]

If from the fragment a whole world was to be summoned, then for both historians and conservators this could only be by the work of imagination. But this conclusion led them in different directions. For conservators, it forestalled the need to restore a sculpture to wholeness, while to historians it gave a license to restore a damaged, or hard to reconstruct, story by amassing a mosaic of other micro stories. Moreover, an essential part of the turn from restoration to conservation can be tracked through changing attitudes to the fragment. If from the fragment a whole world can be summoned, then no restoration is necessary. But how is a fragment to supply this whole world? Answer: through a trained and capacious imagination.

8. Restoration

One of the most famous twentieth-century poems about objects was written about one of the most famous ancient sculptural pieces to have been disinterred in the fifteenth century *and never restored*. It came, eventually, to be celebrated *because* it was a fragment.[94] Rainer Maria Rilke published his "Archaic Torso of Apollo" in 1908 toward the end of his relationship with Auguste Rodin, whose secretary he had been. Just as the ancient sculpture's afterlife lurked in Rodin's small terracotta sculpture of 1890 (fig. 3), which Rilke would have seen in the studio, Rilke's poem about the ancient object may have been inspired by the recently made one.[95]

If the restoration of ancient sculpture was undertaken, in some way, out of a belief in wholeness as "goodness" but also out of a belief that restoration served imagination as well as being made possible by it, then Rilke's poem made this way of thinking seem obsolete. One no longer needed to make

FIGURE 3. Auguste Rodin, small terracotta torso of Apollo. Paris, Musée Rodin. © Musée Rodin (photo Christian Baraja).

whole in order to fire the imagination; with a fiery enough imagination—art triumphing over erudition?—even an unrestored fragment could open worlds.

"Wir kannten nicht," it begins. "We cannot know." Against the limits imposed on knowing by time, the poem wagers poets' ability to find meaning from within. Without this vision, the sculpture would just be a "defaced stone"

(*Stein entstellt*). And it certainly could not "burst forth" "from all its borders" "like a star" (*und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern / aus wie ein Stern*). Nor, finally—and maybe this is Rilke not just pointing to the limit of scholarship but showing us the way beyond scholarship—could it prescribe to us how to live (that devastating concluding phrase: "You must change your life.").[96]

The new aesthetic of the sculptural fragment, which Rilke's early twentieth-century poem embodies, effectively took the heat out of the whole, long debate about restoration versus conservation. From this point on, it became possible to look back on a historical epoch that had become discontinuous with the present and still feel connected to it. (There is a relationship between historicism and this comfort with the fragment.)

But does this mean that restoration lost its raison d'être?

I want to end by suggesting that we may actually be entering a new age of restoration. Let me start with the more obvious and move to the less. Right now, we already intervene to support wildlife populations and manipulate seeds for greater yields and greater resistance to disease; and, for some time, we have been doing things to our own bodies with the goal of extending or reshaping what nature and contingency have done to us. Qua the terms of objects conservation, we so very often are acting as "restorers." Now let's look ahead to an age when conservation in place, *preventive conservation*—of wildlife, of nature, and of ourselves—may not be enough. Restoration, whether in the form of GMOs or geoengineering or bioengineering, might be required if this one earth of ours is to remain habitable for future generations of human beings. That means making choices. It means revisiting positions that art conservation has been trying to escape from for the past century and more. How can we take what we have learned about history and memory and responsibility and bring that to the needs of the world of our children? I take this as an invitation to broaden our range of reference—yet another argument for looking at conservation through the lenses of the human sciences.

I mentioned Freud's name a few pages ago, though some of you may by now have been wondering how we could have gone this deep into an expanded vision of conservation without him. For Freud had a vision of the human psyche as full of fragmentary memories and associated identities accumulated over time. He described this as the "general problem of preservation in the sphere of the mind." What is so particular about the mind as a conservation machine is that it keeps everything. "That in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances . . . it can once more be

brought to life."[97] Rome was the city that provided him with material for his thought experiment, and even if it fell short of the mind's infinite capacity for preservation, it made the point more strongly than could any other example that a big part of the work of psychoanalysis deals with conservation.

From what we now know about the work of memory, we would add to Freud that the brain might keep all our memories, but that recalling them always changes them. Yet, this idea, too, has been anticipated, and by using a notion of "restoration." In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard explained "that we can go deeper, that we can sense how a human being can devote himself to things and make them his own by perfecting their beauty." That the restorative power of conservation justifies going beyond the limits of "conserving."

> And what a great life it would be if, every morning, every object in the house could be made anew by our hands, could "issue" from our hands. In a letter to his brother Theo, Vincent van Gogh tells him that we should "retain something of the original character of a Robinson Crusoe." Make and remake everything oneself, make a "supplementary gesture" toward each object, give another facet to the polished reflections, all of which are so many boons the imagination confers upon us by making us aware of the house's inner growth.[98]

Salvatore Settis has recently made a powerful argument for the way in which "reuse" or "recycling" is a form of conservation. We might describe this as a "passive" practice, in much the same way that collection conserves—not as its primary goal but as an inevitable concomitant. But Settis goes further, pointing out that this process of reuse, because it inevitably enjambs temporalities (what Cesare Brandi, as we will see in chapter 4, refers to as the "times" of the object and the conservator), always offers the meaning-hunting historian a rich scene to feast upon.[99] One of the most beautiful dialectical presentations of this relationship between reuse and conservation also emerged out of a recent exhibition, this of Sidival Fila's work at the Vatican Library. Fila does not restore an object by making it beautiful again, or even more beautiful than it was originally, in order to return it to use, but in order to call attention to life's histories and to celebrate the vicissitudes that are the material trace of the companionship of things and people in this world. We could learn from Fila to replace restoration with "redemption." But we could also replace it with "love."[100]

(continued...)

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