

The "higher ideals" mentioned above, such as "curing the sick" or "achieving justice," benefit the clients of medicine and law. They also benefit society at large by contributing to the well-being of the community. Both the public and professionals see professions as protecting vulnerable interests (see *The Report of the Professional Organizations Committee, Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario, 1980*, in Ramsay-Jolicoeur 1993).

Conservators have described themselves as "advocates for the artifact" (Phillips 1982; Ward 1986). The UK Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works' (1981) *Guidance for Conservation Practice* notes the conservator's responsibility to uphold the best interests of the object. In this sense the object is seen as the primary client of the profession. For example, according to Merrill (1990, 170): "Our loyalty is not owed to our institutions, organizations, or colleagues, but rather to the unique and irreplaceable objects that embody our history, culture and aspirations." It has also been argued that people are the primary clients of conservation (e.g., the people who attend public museums and, especially, future generations).

Conservation is, however, object-centred; this is the basis of the profession. Michalski (1994b, 257) considers a point of view not usually explicitly stated in conservation, one reflecting an acknowledgment of the cultural values of heritage preservation: "We must realize that to say we have a responsibility to the objects is only a parable. Our responsibility is to our biological inheritance as perceptive, active, emotional beings and our social inheritance as knowledgeable, cultured beings, as influenced by objects."

The literature on professions often defines responsibility as belonging to those interests in the project that are vulnerable. The *Report of the Professional Organizations Committee* referred to by Ramsay-Jolicoeur (1993) outlines three categories of interests, all of which are potentially vulnerable. First-party interests are those of the providers of the service (e.g., the conservators); second-party interests are those of the clients of the professional services (e.g., those who have purchased the service, such as museums or collectors); and third-party interests are those who have neither provided nor purchased the service but are likely to be affected by it (e.g., the general public). The vulnerability of second- and, especially, third-party interests have justified the regulation of professions such as architecture, engineering, law, and others.

Another way of configuring the question of vulnerability and determining the clients of conservation is to ask, "who will be harmed by bad conservation measures?" Damage to unique cultural property could result in irreparable loss. As with the issue of public safety, even monetary reparations can never repair permanent injury, or "death," of a unique object. This perspective alters the definitions given above for second- and third-party interests, and will be discussed later in arguments about the preservation of unique ecological features and non-renewable resources.

Other clients who could be harmed by bad conservation follow the conventional definition of second- and third-party interests (except for the last "client," which will be mentioned below). These are the owner of the work, the originator of the work (of special concern if poor conservation measures have destroyed or significantly altered an artist's unique creation), the public, and the collectivities who might suffer the loss of some aspect of their cultural material heritage. In addition, the institution housing the works might be harmed, both financially and in terms of credibility.

Again, it should be noted that many of the characteristics of the conservation profession are intertwined with conservation's association with museums and galleries. In the past, public museums have been defined as non-profit institutions contributing to the benefit of society at large. Their collections have often been thought of as embodying and making accessible higher ideals, such as "truth" and "beauty." With regard to both museums and conservation, the larger society has been defined as "the public" as well as "future generations"; however, "public" has usually meant the majority culture. Now, however, in Western society there is increasing recognition of diversity and of particular minority "stakeholders" whose special needs must also be served.

In discussing the relationship between conservation, science, and museums, it should be noted that there has been a long relationship between the general public and science. Writers in the history of science (e.g., R.C. Olby) have noted, for example, the contested ground that has occurred between the elitist, theoretical aspects of some avenues of science (e.g., mathematical science) and the lived experience and knowledge of even the highly educated public. Museums have played an important role in creating an interface between science and the public. Conservation, which has shown itself as a subject of interest to a wide audience, particularly when featured in articles and exhibitions, has also contributed to this interface. On the other hand, the popularization of science is fraught with pitfalls, such as those inherent in accurately translating scientific language into language that is accessible to the public (Olby, Cantor et al. 1990).

The status of conservators as professionals with a basis in science confers on them characteristics that could become contestatory in their relationships with First Nations peoples. Primarily, it endows conservators with "expert" status vis-à-vis the preservation of cultural heritage – a status recognized, if at times grudgingly, by the rest of the museum community as well as by a knowledgeable general public. Conservators are seen to have specialized knowledge, provable methods, non-controversial ethics and standards, and the right to assume authority in their area of specialization. They are also firmly in the mainstream of Western culture with regard to how the preservation of heritage resources should be approached. All of this validates how conservators define themselves and their field.

Inside Conservation: Codes of Ethics and Values

There is no universally accepted definition of conservation, but the codes of ethics for conservators in different countries provide the clearest and most agreed upon descriptions of this field. The common principles and language stem, in part, from the fact that the conservation codes of ethics originated in the IIC-American Group's Murray Pease report of 1963 and in each country's examination of other national codes of ethics (Pease 1968). In this section I examine the role a code of ethics plays within a profession in order to understand how accurately it defines the principles of that profession. I then provide a number of examples of how conservators define their profession. I continue with an analysis of several values expressed in the principles of conservation that pertain particularly to contemporary ethnographic conservation.

Underlying Assumptions

A principal assumption underlying conservation codes of ethics is that it is worthwhile to preserve objects in museums. As Welsh says: "Art conservation was built on a belief in the preservation of art and other cultural material, a mission that has seemed so fundamentally worthwhile and desirable that it has not even been considered debatable" (Welsh, Sease, et al. 1992, 13). Not only do they have a strong belief in the value of preserving designated objects, but conservators also believe that conservation is fundamental to the museum. "*Preservation* is the most fundamental of [a museum's] responsibilities, since without it, research and presentation are impossible and collection is pointless" (Ward 1986, 1).

What Does an Idealized Code Reflect?

Some conservators do not believe that codes of ethics have real value because, for example, conservation encompasses too many different subdisciplines, each having different antecedents and different norms of practice. Ashley-Smith (1994) has pointed out the effect these differences have had at the Victoria and Albert Museum. With regard to codes of ethics, Oddy (1992, 12) argues: "Numerous attempts have been made to codify these 'rules,' but all are doomed to failure because the approach to conservation can never be generalised, and is very dependent on the aims of the particular museum and curator." However, if conservation wishes to be seen as having professional status, then the responsibility of the professional to her/his clients and to the society at large needs to be overtly stated. A codified acknowledgment of professional ethics and conduct serves the primary purpose of protecting the vulnerable parties in the relationship between conservators and their clients. In addition, a code of ethics acknowledges the profession's willingness to explicitly take collective responsibility for its

professional conduct (Newton 1988). Wueste (1994, 34) says that professional norms are the product of both official action by a group and customary norms that develop through public forums.

This is not to say that the difficulties pointed out by Oddy must be submerged in the interests of having a single code. According to Newton (1988, 50):

It has been asked if a "code of ethics" is not, all by itself, a contradiction in terms; as a set of rules that to outward appearances are to be applied more or less mechanically, it can hardly be adequate to the infinite variety of individual situations that present us with ethical dilemmas ... And when the practice which the ethic is supposed to guide is changing rapidly to meet changing conditions, putting tremendous strain on individual practitioners and organizations alike, the maintenance of a coherent ethic may be an all but impossible task.

Newton concludes, however, that the dialogue created by these tensions (i.e., by the reactions of individual professionals who also have personal moral codes, attempting to apply general rules to particular situations as they serve a public trust) is fundamental. Conservators such as Ashley-Smith might agree (see Ashley-Smith 1982). It is the process, the practice and articulation of a collective ethic, not the finished code, that makes a profession a moral enterprise, often distinguishing it from other job categories and making it worthy of being entrusted with caring for cultural heritage. The code contains the collective ideals of the profession, which are a necessary element in the articulation of a professional ethic. Through a code of ethics "the practitioner, already initiated into the standard practices of the profession, is initiated into its ideals; through it also, these ideals are tested against the criterion of translatability into practical and enforceable rules" (Newton 1988, 53).

As we have seen, the values predominant in the fine arts and classical archaeology/antiquities have influenced how conservation was originally conceived and expressed in its codes of ethics. The emphasis on great aesthetic works reflects a different focus from that displayed in many museums. Whereas museologists have said that they are concerned with knowledge, and with the object as an embodiment of that knowledge, art gallery personnel are more concerned with the work itself, placing a high value on the importance of the original aesthetic object and its preservation. As one author has recently commented in a debate over the use of computer images in an art gallery: "If there's one thing a work of art is *not* about, it's information ... You're graphically shrinking the scope of the experience by having it almost completely eliminate the necessity of seeing the *thing*" (Freedman 1995, 51).

With regard to codes of ethics, ethnographic collections have benefited by the inclusion of what has been called the "single standard of care." This principle appears to have been included in order to ensure that *all* works coming to the conservator's attention, not just the most valued ones or the ones that have the most appeal to the conservator or curator, are given the same degree of respect and professional expertise and the same standard of treatment. Ideally, the single standard means that, for the conservator, ethnographic collections are equal to works of fine art and that pieces from Aboriginal cultures will receive the same respectful treatment as do European pieces. The single standard principle also supports the scientific meta-narrative: a belief in objectivity and the search for knowledge. However, not only have some writers questioned the premise that conservators do not make value judgments about pieces, but Aboriginal peoples are asking that certain collections (e.g., those having spiritual importance) be treated differently from other collections.

Conservation as Iterated by Its Practitioners

The following quotations provide a summary of the normative attitudes of conservators towards their field and their practice. They underline their understanding that their field is rooted in the physical aspects of objects and that their job is to prevent objects from physically deteriorating, stabilize deteriorated objects, repair damage, and appropriately restore the physical appearance of objects following codified ethics and guidelines.

1974: The restorer's responsibility is to stabilize and protect the subject; no more and no less. (Cains 1974, 164)

1984: [The task of] conservator-restorers ... is to comprehend the material aspect of objects of historic and artistic significance in order to prevent their decay. (ICOM 1984, sec. 2.2)

1986: *Conservation* is the technology by which preservation is achieved. (Ward 1986, 1)

1990: ... with our understanding of the physical needs of a particular work of art. (Barclay 1990, 24)

1990: Conservators ... are responsible for the physical care of works of art. (Ibid., 25)

1993: Conservators, correctly or not, occupy themselves primarily with the physical integrity of the pieces they are working on. They concentrate on

stabilizing the physical condition of the collections. (Hutchins, personal communication, 28 November 1993)

1994: Technically, conservation is the empirical science of stabilizing a work or preserving it from damage or destruction ... In the broadest sense then, an art conservator is a professional responsible for the physical preservation, repair, and maintenance of cultural property. (Giffords 1995, 18)

1994: The primary aim of conservation is to slow the processes of deterioration and make sure that instances of sudden damage are made less probable. (Ashley-Smith 1994, 3)

1998: When taken together, these two principles [i.e., respect for the integrity of the object and striving to achieve the highest standards in conservation work] guide the conservator to do what is in the best interest of the object without compromising its tangible as well as its nontangible aspects. (Sease 1998, 102)

1998: At the core of all conservation work lies the object, and respect for the integrity of the object is of paramount importance if it is to maintain its value as evidence of social or technical history, or even its own unique beauty. (Landi 1998, 4)

At the same time, as previously discussed, conservators recognize the complexity of their field: it is an integral part of conservation that conservators understand and incorporate values that go beyond those associated with the purely physical attributes of the objects.

In 1999 Whalen, a conservation administrator, offered the following anecdote:

I sat in an interesting meeting recently with five or six very distinguished people from the conservation profession, and if any disagreement arose, it had to do with the definition of conservation. It seemed to me that half the people at the table thought that conservation was literal intervention, probably on an object. The other half had, I think, a much broader view of conservation, one that relates to sites and cultural landscapes, open-ended theoretical research, and the constellation of professionals in between. (Whalen 1999, 13)

He later stated: "We [the Getty Conservation Institute] can't operate as a modern conservation institute if we aren't considering the broader philosophical and intellectual underpinnings of the field" (15).

Selected Conservation Values and Beliefs Particularly Relevant to Ethnographic Conservation

Integrity of the Object

The goal of conservation is to preserve material cultural heritage within an ethical framework that ensures that the intrinsic nature of the object is not altered. As Keene (1994, 19) writes: "At the foundation of the conservation ethic lies the precept 'thou shalt not change the nature of the object.'" The 1981 United Kingdom and New Zealand codes use the words "true nature of the object," and the CAC and the AIC (until 1995) use the word "integrity." Integrity is not defined in the codes, and comments in the *AIC News* discuss how difficult it is to define or explain it (American Institute for Conservation 1992a). According to Sease (1998, 102): "Integrity is a broad term that can be defined as being an unmarred, unimpaired, or uncorrupted condition. Accordingly it conveys a sense of something not having been violated. But the codes do not state explicitly what constitutes such violation or corruption, leaving the word open for interpretation among the [conservation] specialities." Integrity should not be interpreted as the equivalent of "pristine"; however, the integrity of a corroded archaeological object, for example, includes all that is currently extant of that object, even though it is no longer whole and unmarred. Likewise the integrity of an object might include signs of wear (historical integrity).

Most codes of ethics signify physical integrity, aesthetic integrity, and historical integrity. In 1989 the Canadian code went further and added the idea of "conceptual integrity." The 1999 Australian code uses the phrases "cultural integrity" and "conceptual characteristics" in its section on appropriate treatment (Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials 1999, 7, 13). Again, while not explicitly defined, "conceptual integrity" includes properties "beyond the physical" (e.g., the cultural significance or religious significance of objects) (Hodkinson 1991). Among archivists the term "intrinsic value" has been used for many years in relation to materials whose value lies in their retaining their original form.

Since the codes of ethics use the terms "physical," "historic," "aesthetic," and "conceptual integrity" but do not define them, it can be difficult to distinguish the boundaries between each term. For example, with regard to a work of art, aesthetic integrity can be considered to be part of conceptual integrity. Furthermore, at a general level, conservators do consider all the "integrities" in their work so that, when one attempts to ascertain how they balance out preserving physical integrity with preserving conceptual integrity, we may appear to be dealing with a false dichotomy.

While the goal of conservation is to retain and restore the culturally significant qualities of the object, in the past "cultural significance" has not usually presented the kinds of conflicts that come from having to deal with

living people who want to see the objects to which they lay claim serve living purposes. These purposes and the power of the requesters are new to the traditional museum paradigm. In addition, determining "conceptual integrity" by consulting with the current generation of people who have the "conceptual" rights to the objects in question rather than by consulting only the literature or the curators, introduces a new area to conservation. And this, in turn, raises the question of how to adequately train conservators for this part of their work.

In part, preserving the essence of the object became a guiding principle in conservation in order to counteract past restoration practices that involved, for example, "see[ing] [the work of art] return to the workshops at least once every generation to be stripped and reconstituted in the name of the currently fashionable aesthetic principle. We know only too well that aesthetics vary greatly according to individuals, periods and regions" (Coremans 1969, 16). Scientific conservation, however, was intended to preserve the object according to a scientific meta-narrative that claimed to guarantee objectivity and to ensure that the object would be preserved in and of itself, regardless of the ever-changing tastes and politics of society.

It is not just scientific, but also museum meta-narratives that are represented by the conservator's desire to preserve the physical, aesthetic, and historic integrity of the object. For example, as mentioned previously, museums place a high value on authenticity, which is another way of constructing an idea about an object's "true nature." In general, conservation reasoning about integrity is based on supporting physical evidence present in or on the object as well as on documentation.

The importance of the concept of authenticity as a museum value has already been mentioned. Pearce (1992, 1995c) is one author who discusses why "the real thing" and "real facts" are so attractive in Western cultures, and why their representations are considered worthy of being housed in special institutions. Conserving the "true nature" of objects is an attempt to keep intact their evidentiary value and their connection to the past. In archives, the qualities determining intrinsic value may be physical or intellectual, giving the records evidential or informational value and making their retention in their original form the only acceptable way of preserving them (National Archives and Records Service 1982). It may also be that museums place a high value on the physical evidence found in and on objects because they recognize the idiosyncratic paths that lead some objects to be preserved in museums while others are not, as well as how much the objects in museums have been decontextualized, interpreted, and reinterpreted. The object is the tangible touchstone for a reality that exists despite such losses. As Pearce (1995c, 14) says: "Objects have a brutally physical existence ... This means that objects ... always retain an intrinsic link with

the original context from which they come because they are always stuff of its stuff no matter how much they may be repeatedly reinterpreted." Thus museums also value objects as discrete physical entities, displayed on walls or in cases, most often as aesthetic or historical objects. Some would say that museums essentialize the object. Integrity, then, represents the essence of the essence. In addition, one sees in the notions of "true nature" or "integrity" one of the modern meta-narratives of the art world: the artist is a unique individual with a unique vision, and the work of art is an individual creation that is significant in and of itself.

A relevant question is whether conservators believe that integrity is a matter of interpretation or a matter of attributes intrinsic to the object. If the latter, then, conservators would say that the object's attributes are preserved when the object is ethically conserved. Since this defines the field of conservation, it follows that conservators have assumed the authority to impose their conventions on museum objects as well as their beliefs as to the significance of these acts of preservation. Both of these areas have been contested by First Nations.

The idea that an object's attributes are intrinsic holds that these attributes are observable, objective facts. For conventional conservation in conventional museums, the role of conservation in preserving the physical, historic, and aesthetic integrity of pieces is not usually contested unless the physical or documentary evidence for an attribute is contested. In other words, if evidence is lacking for making a clear decision on some matter regarding one of the attributes, then there may be controversy; however, there is usually no controversy about the basic fact that the object should be conserved. The idea of intrinsic attributes strengthens the conservation ethic that attempts to preserve objects intact, holding them outside the passing influences of cultural and temporal events. The importance of intrinsic attributes is manifested in the conservation principle of minimum intervention. If, however, the importance of attributes recognized as objective facts (based on physical and documentary evidence) depends on how they are interpreted, then it must be recognized that it is impossible to preserve objects free of the influence of current cultural mores and that there will be different valid points of view regarding what is most important to preserve.

Pearce (1992), Ames (1993-4), Handler (1992), and Crew and Sims (1991), among others, all illustrate that it is interpretation, the socially constructed meanings of objects, that give them their intrinsic value. Handler, for instance, provides examples showing that proven facts such as date of attribution and the artist's name are not necessarily significant as they have no meaning unless interpreted. If meaning is a matter of interpretation, then cultural values are superimposed and then read as the truth. Conservators

who see integrity as intrinsic to the object may believe that the truth elucidated through scientific investigation without seeing that even the parameters of "investigation" are determined by their own cultural values. Conservators may also view one or several of the "integrities" as being more socially constructed than the others, with physical integrity being perhaps the least value-laden.

There is a contextual parallel here between the ethics of conservation and the ethics of ecology. One belief of some ecologists is that natural phenomena such as forests, animals, and marine life are valuable in and of themselves and should be preserved accordingly. In other words, they deserve protection from destruction for the same reasons that apply to objects in museums: they are unique and irreplaceable. In museums, the value placed on authenticity, which is tied to a particular time, maker, and cultural context, makes the object unique and irreplaceable. With natural phenomena, uniqueness and irreplaceability devolve from the fact that their creation and "integrity" are not the result of a human hand; therefore, human creations can never replace them. Of relevance here is the question of whether something threatened by human actions can be considered valuable in and of itself and therefore in need of human-instituted methods of protection. Can phenomena have a kind of ultimate value outside of temporal and cultural contexts or can the only value they have be determined by humans? Regarding archaeological and site-related cultural properties, Messenger (1989, 19) discusses the related "Non-Renewable Resource Argument" and its relation to the concept of stewardship rather than ownership.

Regarding "conceptual integrity," within the museum it can be said that, in general, it is of the greatest importance to the curator: it is a realm of knowledge that gives meaning to the object. As has been mentioned, many conservators believe that meaning and context is the proper realm of the curator or art historian, whereas physical preservation is the proper realm of the conservator. This means that decisions involving preserving the physical versus preserving the conceptual may be based on institutional power factors (i.e., the museum hierarchy and its personalities) as much as on individual viewpoints concerning what it is important to preserve.

In museums, it is sometimes up to conservation treatment to reveal what is considered the "true nature" of a deteriorated piece. Occasionally, decisions involve striking a balance between physical and conceptual integrity. For example, a leather shoe would originally have been flexible; if age has made the leather harden, then is it necessary to restore flexibility? Or is it only necessary to restore the appearance of flexibility? Conceptual integrity may apply to the physical aspect of objects as well as to their cultural significance, both of which influence conservators' decisions about treatment (see Bomford 1994a and Podany 1994 for a discussion on the fine arts).

Concerning ethnographic objects, for example, for the exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York (and other venues, including the Royal British Columbia Museum [RBCM] in Victoria) of the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, *Chiefly Feasts*, masks were renewed by the AMNH conservators on the advice of First Nations consultants. The original type of hair on some of these masks, however, was not available, and hair from Chinese goats (which has a similar appearance) was used instead (Ostrowitz 1993; Levinson and Nieuwenhuizen 1994). Note that in this case "integrity," ironically, involves a measure of falsification: the appearance is right, but the actual materials are of a different nature than those that appear in the original. In fine arts, this has been an accepted practice with regard to "in-painting" losses as a way of distinguishing the original from the restoration; what is under study here are the various interpretations of "integrity." A further question arises regarding ethnographic objects, which Appelbaum (1991, 219) has previously been quoted as saying are preserved in their "as-used" rather than in their "as-created" state: does this imply a balance in favour of one of the "integrities" – for example, historic versus conceptual? Or is conceptual integrity in this instance the better term for both?

Traditional conservation may be summarized as being centred on extending the physical life of the object. A more substantive definition of conservation states that its goal is to preserve the meaning of the works as well as their physical substance. Today, First Nations are reclaiming the right to define that meaning for objects from their heritage.

"Cultural Significance" and "Sacred"

As explained earlier, a key element in preserving the integrity of the object is, in short, the idea of preserving its cultural significance. Cultural significance has great potential to be defined in one way by Aboriginal authorities and in another way by museum authorities. The Canadian code of ethics for conservators states that preserving the culturally significant qualities of an object is the purpose of conservation. All codes define cultural property as material that has been declared to be culturally significant. The ICOM document (1984) refers to such objects as "significant expression[s]" of cultural attributes. Conservators are concerned with not altering the meaning of objects, and they rely on other professionals to work with them to ensure that this does not occur.

When it first appeared, the ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value was the only conservation ethics policy that gave First Nations individuals and collectivities the right to guide conservation decisions regarding heritage monuments and sites of cultural significance to them, no matter who the legal owner. The context for this document is meaningful in that it postdates the initial versions of the

other codes of ethics and that it was developed in a country with a legally recognized policy of equality between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. (See Chapter 6 for more information.) In its third revision (2000), the Canadian code of ethics has added certain phrases in an attempt to include First Nations viewpoints on material heritage (see Appendix B), and the Australian code of ethics was revised in 1999 to reflect more sensitivity towards Aboriginal peoples. For example, the AICCM code has a separate section on cultural issues, and indigenous concerns regarding sacred materials are mentioned in the sections on law and regulations, and disaster planning (Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material 1999: 8, 15). The ICOMOS New Zealand Charter, however, remains a landmark with regard to acknowledging indigenous decision making:

The indigenous heritage of Maori and Moriori ... is inseparable from identity and well-being and has particular cultural meanings.

The Treaty of Waitangi is the founding document of our nation and is the basis for indigenous guardianship. It recognizes the indigenous people as exercising responsibility for their treasures, monuments and sacred places.

This interest extends beyond current legal ownership wherever such heritage exists. Particular knowledge of heritage values is entrusted to chosen guardians. The conservation of places of indigenous cultural heritage value is therefore conditional on decisions made in the indigenous community, and should proceed only in this context. Indigenous conservation precepts are fluid and take account of the continuity of life and the needs of the present as well as the responsibilities of guardianship and association with those who have gone before. In particular, protocols of access, authority and ritual are handled at a local level. General principles of ethics and social respect affirm that such protocols should be observed. (ICOMOS 1993, sec. 2)

Objects that have important cultural significance and have been created for ritual use or have ritual prescriptions attached to them are often considered to be "culturally sensitive." These objects may be considered "sacred" in that they are believed to contain an intrinsic quality of "holiness" or power, or they may be objects that make it possible to perform a traditional ritual commandment. In other words, not all ritual objects are considered "sacred" by their originators, but there may still be great cultural significance attached to them and the rituals surrounding them.

In the last fifteen years objects whose cultural significance lies in their being considered "sacred," "sensitive," or "potent" by their originating cultures have become a special issue for museums. Many different concepts of "sacred" are enunciated, and objects may be sacred in different ways. Some objects are not considered sacred according to the definition used in the US

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA),² for example, but there may still be important ritual protocols that First Nations peoples wish to see observed. It discusses objects that fall into the “sacred/sensitive” category, or that can be called “potent” (Welsh 1992), only in relation to conservation practice and ethics. The following examples introduce this topic; more detailed discussions will be found in subsequent sections and chapters.

Power: Some contemporary practitioners believe that certain objects have power within them (e.g., certain pieces in the Pueblo traditions of the American Southwest or objects in New Zealand that have “taha wairua,” or spiritual force). These objects have ritual protocols surrounding them and may be believed to have the potential to cause harm even to non-indigenous peoples. With regard to the concept of harm, Bernstein (1992, 27) asks: “While we physically preserve a sacred object in a museum, are we at the same time causing harm to the culture and the people it represents by holding an object out of context and away from the community responsible for its care and for the maintenance of the traditions it may represent?” Ames (1993, 5), on the other hand, discusses museums and “the empowered object” in the context of its social history and the meanings that it has accrued over the course of that history: “What is important for the scholar or curator, then, is not numinosity itself alone so much as the process by which it is continually constructed and reconstructed as a social object throughout its career as it moves, or is moved, from one context to the next.”

Privacy: Some objects, images, and existing museum documentation are considered by the originating people to be “private,” even if they have previously been accessible to either the public or to museum staff. This is especially true of older collections that were assembled under the mores of a different time period – collections that are now being informed by a contemporary ethical sensibility. “Private” may include the notion of something being accessible to some people but not others (e.g., to initiated members of a group but not to the uninitiated, or to men but not to women).

Politics: One of the arenas in which the concept of “sacred” is enunciated is that of politics and Aboriginal rights. In this context, the use of the word “sacred” has at times been judged to be politically-motivated and therefore less “authentic.” This provides an interesting perspective on the whole discussion of authenticity in museums.

Rupture: One question I asked in the conversations with First Nations people is whether it is necessary to observe protocols and rituals for objects that

2 “For the purposes of this Act, the term ... ‘sacred objects’ ... shall mean specific ceremonial objects which are needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions by their present-day adherents (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act 1990, sec. 2[c]).

have been in a museum for a lengthy period of time. Has the rupture from their originating culture and its practices had any effect on the objects as they exist today? This is asked in relation not just to ritual protocols, but also in relation to museum practices. For example, in storage and maintenance, what is the preference? To follow tradition or to follow contemporary museum practice?

Ritual Use Versus Preservation: The “use” versus “preservation” issue is particularly acute in the area of ritual. Unlike those few objects in museum collections such as clocks, where returning them to a functioning state may be accepted (discussed below), the “function” for First Nations objects is often linked to ceremonial purposes. In some countries, such as the United States (but not Canada) legislation enshrines Aboriginal religious practice (e.g., NAGPRA and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act [AIRFA]).

The ritual use question is by no means restricted to Aboriginal material. For example, in 1993 Aleksei the Second, Patriarch of Moscow and All the Russias, led prayers before an icon during a political event; the icon was an early twelfth-century piece to which miracles have been attributed, and it was borrowed for the event from Moscow’s Tretyakov museum. The icon apparently deteriorated substantially because of the poor physical environment during the event and required extensive restoration.

Code of Ethics – Guidelines: Conservation practice regarding “potent” objects is not explicitly discussed in the codes of ethics and guidance under consideration, with the exception of the New Zealand ICOMOS document. This document is notable as a conservation policy because it states that spiritual values may take precedence over physical preservation: “In some circumstances, assessment may show that any [conservation/preservation] intervention is undesirable. In particular, undisturbed constancy of spiritual association may be more important than the physical aspect of some places of indigenous heritage value” (ICOMOS 1993, sec. 14).

Discussions Regarding Appearance and Treatment of Sacred Objects: The question of appearance and what it signifies, and whether it is appropriate to alter the appearance of a sacred object during conservation treatment, was raised in the conservation literature as early as the 1980s by A. Weersma (1987, 567): “Decay of sacred objects does not necessarily mean a loss of spiritual value ... Some religious objects on the other hand, are required or at least preferred to be as beautiful as possible. Conservation without ‘cosmetic treatment’ would make them unacceptable for devotional practice.”

Mibach (1992, 1), in an introduction to the postprints of the 1991 American Institute of Conservation’s discussion of the conservation of sacred objects, notes that “there may be times when we could solve a technical problem, but when that ability does not also give us the moral right to do so.” Greene (1992) points out that some Jewish holy objects no longer in use may be repaired by a conservator but that others have an intrinsic attribute

of holiness; with regard to the latter, any work performed on them by a conservator would be inappropriate.

In the same AIC postprints Mellor (1992) notes that, for the African objects in the museums he is considering, it is not necessary for conservators to treat them with the same strict ritual protocols that they receive within their own cultural context. Mellor's conclusion, however, is based in part on the premise that first-hand information on these issues is difficult to obtain due to geographic distance. Subsequently, the NAGPRA legislation in the United States, the report from the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples in Canada, and individual conservators have raised the question of assumptions and practicalities regarding consultation. Mellor does, however, raise the undisputed fact that different cultures will express different points of view regarding the treatment of sacred objects. This is reinforced by Greene and others in the same journal.

Articles are beginning to appear in conservation literature that challenge the term "sacred" as well as the categorizations that non-Aboriginal people, both consciously and unconsciously, apply to sacred objects (Heikell, Whiting et al. 1995). For example, Vicki-Anne Heikell, a paper conservator of Maori descent and one of the people whom the reader will hear from later, points out that she has participated in many Maori ceremonies relating to works on paper that "may have been written by an ancestor, may depict an ancestor, may tell a story of an ancestor, or may relate a history of a tribal area" (Heikell, Whiting et al. 1995, 15). These ceremonies acknowledge the work as culturally significant to the Maori group and "involve the same commitment, and command the same respect by Maori people as they would when dealing with 'traditional' treasures such as carvings and cloaks" (ibid.).

John Moses (1995, 18), a trained conservator of Delaware/Mohawk descent who was also interviewed for this book, writes in the same forum that sacred objects may "continue to fulfill roles of spiritual focus and empowerment." He continues: "It might be argued that a museum is not necessarily the setting in which one can hope to experience or comprehend the significance of sacred objects, either from the viewpoint of those who created them, or from the viewpoint of those for whose benefit they were created and originally maintained" (ibid.). He insists that "well informed and carefully considered non-intervention" is an appropriate treatment option (ibid.).

The Relationship between Objects and Living People: One important issue raised by Moses, Bernstein, and others is the need to see sacred objects as "living" objects. Not only are sacred objects potentially different from other museum objects (due to their powerful intangible attributes), but they may also have particular non-museum procedures and rituals attached to them. They have a different relationship to living people than do most museum collections. Although one can argue the "museum-as-temple" and "art-as-

inspiring" perspective, which implies a certain symbolic parallel between awe-inspiring works and sacred objects, there is nonetheless a significant difference between (1) the ritual symbolism of a secular institution and the "icons" it houses and (2) "potent" objects that are at the core of one's cultural identity. The beliefs, ritual protocols, and traditions with which potent objects are associated are essential to maintaining the well-being of both the individual and her/his culture.

Artist's Intent

Respecting the intent of the artist has been one of the guiding principles of conservation. It has been considered primarily in the field of the conservation of works of art, but it also has implications for the conservation of ethnographic objects. Within conservation, respecting the intent of the originator has been mainly expressed as "intent of the artist"; however, as is seen in the Canadian code of ethics (CAC and CAPC 2000), the "original intention" is specifically referred to and conservators are asked, "when applicable," to consult with the originator (General Obligation no. 2). The care and treatment of a cultural property is also defined as being the shared responsibility of the owner, the conservation professional, and (when applicable) the originator (General Obligation no. 1). The originator is defined in the code not only as the creator of the object, but also as his/her representatives "by legal, moral, or spiritual right." This is standard procedure regarding, for example, copyright issues (legal), and it also recognizes the right of religious or ceremonial authorities (spiritual) and community or extended family interests (moral).

In ethnographic conservation, however, those traditionally consulted in order to gain a better understanding of the "intent of the originator" have not been the originators themselves or their descendants but, rather, other professionals (museum curators, art historians, anthropologists). In the current US code, "intent of the artist" has been replaced by "an informed respect for the cultural property ... and the people or person who created it." Respect, however, is not defined; and there are no guidelines regarding what constitutes showing appropriate respect. In the New Zealand code, the language used with regard to intent is strong, as may be seen in the description of responsibility to the owner.

The concerns faced by contemporary art conservators regarding the "intent of the artist" may mirror those faced by ethnographic conservators. Conservators of contemporary art sometimes find that their philosophy and practice conflict with the wishes of the artist (see, for example, Domergue, Lowinger et al. 1987; Merk 1987). One notable difference, however, is that the overriding context within fine arts is usually one of preserving the object while honouring the artist's intent, whereas in ethnographic conservation the intent of preservation itself may be challenged.

Use Versus Preservation

Certain objects in museum collections have been classified as "functional objects" and are used, or "run," rather than preserved according to the norms of standard museum practice. Use in itself can be said to be contrary to the usual purpose of museums. As Ferrell (1991, 44) has argued: "Artifacts enter museums when they cease to be useful." According to this definition, a museum artifact is one that de facto is no longer useful or is no longer fulfilling its original purpose. It has, however, acquired a museum-defined utility such as, for example, usefulness for research or education. Ashley-Smith (1995, 4), interpreting the Victoria and Albert Museum's mission statement, says that the use of an object is that it is capable of being enjoyed or adding to understanding. Rose (1988, 50) comments as follows regarding the parameters of ethnographic collections: "The conservation of an ethnographic object should be based upon a thorough understanding of the purpose in collecting and using that object within the museum community." That is, museum purposes must be recognized.

In general, "functional objects" are pieces that will be misunderstood or unappreciated unless they are restored to a functioning state. As Keene (1994, 19) points out, objects in museums are not just sources of information, but also vehicles for conveying information. When older objects are returned to a functioning state, however, there is a clear possibility that some of the elements that form part of their integrity will be lost. This may occur because: (1) the process of restoration sometimes necessitates alterations to, and possible removal of, both an object's physical and ephemeral aspects³; and (2) continual wear through ongoing use necessitates continual reconstruction.

Long-term preservation is, therefore, seen to be compromised when objects are allowed to be returned to a functioning state. Most objects considered in the category of "functional" are industrial vehicles such as locomotives, airplanes, or automobiles; decorative arts objects such as clocks; and machine-readable records such as sound recordings and computer data, which exist in a physical form but remain incomprehensible if they are not "played." Some excellent papers detailing the issues and ethics surrounding functional objects can be found in conservation and museum literature, and in the literature of avocational groups who restore industrially made vehicles. This literature has not, up to this point, considered ritual objects to be within the category of functional objects. The following points have

3 The "ephemeral" refers here to those aspects of an object's construction that are intentional parts of its craftsmanship or design but that are either not represented materially (such as the spaces between physical elements) or are represented by materials that are deemed marginal or subordinate to the main object (for example pencil marks on the inside).

been made concerning the question of returning some objects in museum collections to a functioning state, so that they can be used or operated:

- 1 Technology plays a role of major significance in the construction of Western society, but the average person cannot comprehend its technical significance: operating machinery, for example, assists in the understanding of the artifact's intent; that is, "what the machine was used for and how it performed its tasks" (Bowditch 1991, 4).
- 2 "Motion is truly the soul and spirit of the machine," "Static displays of machinery might be likened to still photographs of dancers" (Bowditch 1991, 3, 5). The conceptual integrity of the artifact is not complete when the object is static.
- 3 Some objects, such as carriages, are restored to a functioning state even though they themselves are not mechanical objects. Strictly speaking, carriages do not need to be driven to be understood because the motion is provided by the horse and is not intrinsic to the vehicle. Due to technical obsolescence, however, carriages do belong to a class of objects that have undergone a transformation from "useful object," or even "aesthetic and useful object," to something that, in Ferrell's (1991, 44) words, "other than [through] nostalgic associations ... [has been] deleted from cultural memory." Ferrell documents the destruction of complex historic information due to the poor restoration of carriages and maintains that reproductions can satisfactorily accomplish the purpose of understanding the intent of the object.
- 4 Dick (1991) and Gray (1991) discuss ego satisfaction on the part of enthusiasts and/or museum personnel as a primary motivator for having objects restored to a functioning state. Operation becomes the definition of preservation: "Specimens ... are only fulfilled if they operate ... Our standard language deprives them of vitality if they aren't fired-up: ... 'live' steam, a cold engine is 'dead'" (Gray 1991, 15-6). As a writer for *TIGHAR Tracks* (the publication of the International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery) perceptively suggests, however, "somewhere along the way our instinct to preserve got tangled up with our love of flying, and we started preserving airworthiness instead of airplanes" (Anon. 1991, 1).

It should be noted that the ethics of the "use-versus-preservation" debate regarding material heritage have been reconfigured in relation to architectural heritage. Buildings are usually, although not always, immovable, subject to the extremities of outdoor exposure, and expensive to maintain. Their continued preservation in the face of natural deterioration and urban development rests, in part, on finding uses that are both compatible to them and can help sustain them financially. Feilden (1981) states unreservedly

that the best way of preserving buildings is to keep them in use. Modern use, however, almost always necessitates alterations to the original physical structure (e.g., to bring the building up to fire code standards or to make it wheelchair accessible). The ethical compromises one sees in architectural restoration may be unacceptable in other areas of conservation.

Within a museum the preservation-versus-use debate is often situated within that institution's politics and power struggles. It is usually the curators or the educators who wish the object to be restored to a functioning state, and it is usually the conservators who are in the position of advocating for the artifact. Weil (1990, 28) expresses the differences between curators and conservators as follows: "Their [museums'] ultimate importance must lie not in their ability to acquire and care for objects – important as that may be – but in their ability to take such objects and put them to some worthwhile use." As the former director of the Museum of Anthropology at UBC has asked, "Preservation for what purpose?" Ames (personal communication 1991) points out that preservation, like use, has served particular interests: "Why, for example, can only the courier from the British Museum handle an object we borrow, when I can go to the BM stores and plough through the stuff on my own?" Later, he says: "The main point is ... museum rules serve the interests of those who make them, and not just the interests of the objects" (Ames, personal communication, 1997).

One question conservators would raise in response to Weil and Ames' concerns whether "museum use" necessitates physical use or whether its intention can be accomplished in a manner more compatible with preserving the physical object. Curators and educators may well be able to accomplish their goals in ways that do not involve risk to object but this situation is quite different from, for example, those of people concerned with sound recordings, which must be used at least once in order to be understood at all. As Keene (1994, 24) has noted with regard to computer records, "only by [restoring and running a historic computer] can software 'virtual' objects exist."

Conservators have most often taken the position that "the demands of long-term preservation must take precedence over short-term use" (Ward 1986, 9). However, the first statement in the Canadian Code of Ethics includes the word "use": "It is the responsibility of the conservation professional acting alone or with others, to strive constantly to maintain a balance between the need in society to use a cultural property, and to ensure the preservation of that cultural property" (CAC and CAPC 2000, 1). This raises the following questions: to which "society" is the document referring and what constitutes society's need to use designated historical objects? Is the toppling of statues during the post-Communist political upheaval in the Soviet Union an example of "need" (SOS! 1991)?

Conservators: Relationships and Responsibilities

The codes of ethics define a conservator's responsibility towards colleagues, the owner of the work, and the originator of the work. Regarding responsibility to the owner and responsibility to the originator, one can note that ownership falls within legal definitions and that there are strict protocols regarding appropriate professional behaviour. The responsibility to the originator is covered in less precise terms such as "respect." In many countries, however, if the object is a work of art, then responsibility to the originator is covered under copyright legislation. In Canada, for example, copyright law provides for the artist to retain both legal and moral rights to his or her creation.

The existence of copyright legislation, however, as well as related art gallery practice, means that conservators of contemporary art work with living artists to make conservation decisions. As has been noted, the question of First Nations legal rights is being determined largely outside of the museum sphere; however, the acknowledgment of moral rights is affecting the practice of many anthropology museums.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 explores the values and beliefs found in the field of conservation, with special reference to the conservation of Aboriginal material culture. It describes and situates the ethics and values of conservation vis-à-vis three major value systems: that of museums, that of science, and that of professions. It lays the groundwork for understanding how museums and museum conservators go about "preserving what is valued."

Chapter 2 illustrates that conservation, while having differences and disagreements with other museum sectors, is firmly enmeshed in and reflects most museum values. Conservation contributes significantly to the curatorial mandate and to determining the rendering of the object that will be seen and kept. Chapter 1 shows how science came to be one of the defining characteristics of the field of conservation, and Chapter 2 shows that its values are still strongly adhered to, although some conservators recognize that subjectivity plays a role even in conservation practices based on a scientific approach. Professionalization has contributed its own set of values to conservation, although some of its elements are still not clearly defined. For example, who are the clients of conservation? and to whom are conservators responsible? The answers to these questions have a bearing on how conservators construct their work in relation to First Nations.

Chapter 2 examines conservation by reviewing both its professional codes of ethics and how conservators themselves look at what they do. It highlights beliefs pertinent to First Nations perspectives: these include conservators' perspectives on what they are preserving, both in relation to "integrity

of the object” and “cultural significance”; opinions on use versus preservation; the responsibility of the conservator to the originator of the piece; and conservation practice in relation to material culture deemed sacred by its originators. The following chapters discuss First Nations perspectives on these issues.