

"PRESERVING THE PAST OR THE FUTURE? TENSIONS BETWEEN MUSEUMS' TRADITIONAL MANDATE TO PRESERVE AND EXHIBIT CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PLANET AND FUTURE GENERATIONS"

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Abstract

This article attempts to examine the acts of civil resistance that unfolded around artworks in museum collections in 2022-2024, with the aim of stimulating a discourse on how museums have been able - and potentially could be - to respond to these actions and the underlying claims they make. It also explores more broadly the tensions eco-activist actions have highlighted between museums' traditional mandate to preserve and exhibit cultural heritage, and their responsibilities to the planet and future generations. This article examines how museums have responded to these actions and the underlying claims they make, while also considering the wider implications of this interaction between environmental activism and cultural institutions. It raises the central question of the responsibilities of museums as cultural institutions in a world facing unprecedented environmental challenges. This article finally provides some perspectives on how these historic institutions strike a balance between preserving the past and actively engaging in the struggle for the future of the planet.

Keywords: Civil Resistance, Eco-Activism, Ecological Transition, Degrowth, Conservation

Since 2022, several dozen instances of civil resistance actions promoting ecological advocacy have occurred across various museums in Europe, as well as in Australia and North America. These eco-activist actions have illuminated the tensions between museums' traditional mandate to preserve and exhibit cultural heritage, and their responsibility towards the planet and future generations. This article aims to interrogate how museums have responded to these actions and the underlying demands they entail, while also delving into the broader implications of this interaction between environmental activism and cultural institutions. It raises the pivotal question of museums' responsibility as cultural entities in a world grappling with unprecedented ecological challenges. How can these historical institutions strike a balance between preserving the past and actively engaging in the fight for the planet's future?

This article will first focus on demonstrating how museums, through their actions and institutional statements published on their website and in the press, contribute to the repression and stigmatization of these acts of civil resistance and the collectives that advocate for them. Subsequently, this article will scrutinize certain alternative propositions that museums, not necessarily directly targeted by these actions, may have implemented, through two case studies: the invitation made to Letzte Generation by the Kunsthalle in Hamburg to conduct readings on climate change and engage a dialogue with the museum and its audience; A Few Degrees More initiative by the Leopold Museum in Vienna, and a collaboration between the Climate Change Center Austria and the museums' curators. Finally, in a third phase, this paper will offer further reflections on how could museums go further in their own ecological transition. We will question their role in educating our eyes towards environmental aesthetics, the environmental impact of their collections, as well as the paradigm of growth that underpins the very principle of collecting and the need to re-examine our cultural relationship to the accumulation of objects.

This reflection aims to initiate a constructive dialogue on the role of museums in addressing the climate crisis and their responsibility as influential institutions within society. In his recent work, 'Museums and Societal Collapse', Robert R. Janes argues that museums can contribute to this transition as 'key resources in starting the conversation around a new story for our species - moving from the myth of continuous economic growth and human exceptionalism to the durability and well-being of communities and the natural world'ⁱ. Julie Grieshaber and Martin Müller (UNIL) recently published the results of an international survey conducted through questionnaires with over 200 leading cultural institutions, of which 43% were museums. The survey revealed that for 61% of respondents, sustainability considerations have only been integrated into their deliberations within the last five years. As Martin Müller and Julie Grieshaber write, until now, museums 'have generally enjoyed public goodwill and have avoided scrutiny by pressure groups. A wave of protest actions in 2022-2023-2024, during which activists have staged the defacing of artworks in major museums around the world to draw attention to the lack of divestment from fossil fuels, suggests that this period has ended'ⁱⁱ.

Museum Repression of Eco-Activism

'Art institutions need to become the adults in the room' The first of this wave of acts of civil resistanceⁱⁱⁱ (in the form of staged acts of vandalism on and around artworks protected by glass) conducted within museums by eco-activist collectives occurred on June 29, 2022, in the United Kingdom, when the artwork *My heart's in the Highlands* (Horatio McCulloch, 1860) was at the center of an action organized by the Just Stop Oil collective at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in

Glasgow, Scotland. Emma Brown, a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art who participated in this action (during which two supporters of Just Stop Oil glued their hands to the frame of the painting while another read a statement), stated: 'I am taking this action because art is about telling the truth and connecting to our deepest emotions. But right now, when we need them most – art institutions are failing us. They seem to think it's enough to put on an exhibition about climate change rather than challenge the government's genocidal plans to allow new oil and gas. This is unacceptable'iv.

Museums have thus been directly addressed, on multiple occasions, by the perpetrators of acts of civil resistance that have taken place within their walls. Another example occurred after the action surrounding the artwork Thomson's Aeolian Harp (William Turner, 1809), on July 1, 2022, at the Manchester Art Gallery. Just Stop Oil, the collective that claimed responsibility for the act, stated that it was calling on artistic institutions to join them in civil resistance against climate change. One of the activists from Just Stop Oil who participated in the action declared: 'No one gets a free pass. By refusing to use its power and influence to help end this madness, the art establishment is complicit in genocide. Directors of art institutions should be calling on the government to stop all new oil and gas projects immediately'v. Simon Bramwell, co-founder of the Extinction Rebellion movement, who participated in organizing actions of the British coalition Just Stop Oil, emphasized that it was time for the art world to rally behind the climate cause, asserting that "art institutions need to become the adults in the room'vi.

Museums' Response: Denunciation and Condemnation

In response, most museums reacted through speeches and actions aimed at condemning these acts of civil resistance. On November 9, 2022, the leaders of 92 museums issued a statement primarily focusing on the potential damage to artworks: activists 'severely underestimate the fragility of these irreplaceable objects, which must be preserved as part of our world cultural heritage', reads the open letter. 'As museum directors entrusted with the care of these works, we have been deeply shaken by their risky endangerment'vii. However, it is noteworthy that a few days later, on November 11, 2022, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) issued a more nuanced statement, asserting to 'acknowledge and share both the concerns expressed by museums regarding the safety of collections and the concerns of climate activists as we face an environmental catastrophe that threatens life on Earth', expressing its wishes 'for museums to be seen as allies in facing the common threat of climate change'viii.

Alongside these collective statements, which exhibit varying degrees of recognition - if not consideration - towards the motivations of eco-activists, museum officials who have been directly targeted by their actions have tended to adopt a stance reaffirming the sanctity of cultural heritage, while simultaneously denouncing the activities of the eco-activists. 'We naturally distance ourselves from actions where art or cultural heritage risks being damaged. Cultural heritage has a great symbolic value and it is unacceptable to attack or destroy it, regardless of the purpose'^{ix}, stated Per Hedström, acting director of the National Museum of Stockholm, after an action took place there concerning the painting *The Artist's Garden at Giverny* (Claude Monet, 1900), on June 14, 2023. Another example, 'We condemn the protest that took place in the museum. The works have not been damaged but the frames have suffered slight blemishes. [...] We reject endangering cultural heritage as a means of protest'^x, stated the Prado Museum in a press release following the action that occurred within its walls surrounding the artworks *The Nude Maja* and *The Clothed Maja* (Francisco de Goya, 1795-1800 and 1800-1803) on November 5, 2022. This type of statement unilaterally rejects the methods used by these collectives, without questioning their choice to target museums in relation to the cause they advocate. It does not reflect any stance in favor of the relevance of the fight against ecological collapse, nor does it consider the possibility of proposing alternative methods of action in response to this crisis.

The question of the legitimacy of the eco-activists' claims is seldom addressed, and the tone of discourse and statements from museum officials who have been the scene of such actions varies little. In any case, these declarations from museum officials have primarily aimed to denounce and condemn acts of civil resistance; a stance that we have observed materialize in the actions taken by museums in response to the eco-activists' acts of civil resistance, as illustrated by the statements following the action that took place at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich surrounding the painting *The Massacre of the Innocents* (Peter Paul Rubens, 1638) on August 28, 2022. While Bernhard Maaz, Director General of the State Paintings Collections of Bavaria, stated: 'It is not legitimate to damage unique testimonies to humanity's culture to denounce given climatic problems'^{xi}, the museum's spokesperson asserted: 'We will of course assert our claims under civil law'^{xii}.

Indeed, the museums that have been the stages for these eco-activist actions have overwhelmingly chosen to file complaints against those involved, which, as we shall see, constitutes a notable stance, potentially contextualized through a comparison with the treatment, over recent decades, of museum vandalism. Consequently, it becomes evident that through these verbal and procedural responses, museums actively contribute to the repression of these eco-activist acts and the stigmatization - or even criminalization - of the collectives advocating for them.

Legal Proceedings: Neither Mechanical Nor Insignificant Choices

Choosing to pursue legal action against eco-activists is a decision that the vast majority of museums, which have been the sites of the aforementioned actions, have made. Subsequent to these prosecutions, certain activists have been fined, such as Eilidh McFadden and Tom Johnson, who pined the wax effigy of King Charles at Madame Tussaud's museum in London in October 2022. They were each fined £3,500, with an additional £1,750 in damages. One received a twelve-month conditional discharge, while the other, who had previously received a conviction related to climate activism, was sentenced to a twelve-month community order. Others have been sentenced to prison terms, with or without suspension. For instance, Wouter Mouton and David S., the activists who staged an action on Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* at the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague in October 2022, were each sentenced to one month in prison. Similarly, Emily Brocklebank and Louis McKechnie, who glued their hands to the frame of Vincent Van Gogh's *Blossoming Almond Tree* at the Courtauld Gallery in London in June 2022, were respectively sentenced to a 21-day suspended prison sentence with a six-week electronic curfew for one, and three weeks of imprisonment for the other. Guido Viero and Ester Goffi, on the other hand, glued their hands to the pedestal of the *Laocoon Group* (circa 40 BC) at the Vatican Museums in August 2022. They were fined €1,500 each, ordered to pay over €28,000 in damages, and received a nine-month suspended prison sentence.

In order to provide context for these punitive measures, it is instructive to draw parallels between them and the decisions made by museums that have encountered instances of art vandalism (rather than actions directed at works protected by glass or at pedestals, frames, and surrounding walls) within the same geographic areas in recent decades.

An international investigation into art vandalism between 1970 and 2020^{xiii} has gathered data on the repercussions, in terms of legal or psychiatric interventions, of fifty-seven cases of art vandalism occurring in museums. When the consequences of the acts are known, in five cases the vandals were sentenced to a suspended prison term, in nine cases to a period of probation, and in four cases to community service or community work. In ten cases, individuals were sentenced to imprisonment, in five cases to pay a fine and/or to compensate, in nine cases, for damages. In fifteen cases, the vandal was subject to a care order or hospitalization in a psychiatric hospital, and in six cases, to a ban on entering museums or the museum where the act of vandalism occurred. Finally, seventeen cases of vandalism did not result in any legal or psychiatric intervention. It should be noted that in all cases, the acts involved damage to the physical integrity of

artworks, rather than vandalism of exhibition equipment (protective glass, frames, walls, and floors of exhibition halls), as in the case of more recent eco-activist actions.

As an example drawn from this corpus of acts of artwork degradation, not related to an artistic intervention, one can note that the man who, in December 1999, visited the Brooklyn Museum and went behind the protective glass of the artwork *The Holy Virgin Mary* (Chris Ofili, 1996) to splatter it with white paint, faced only a \$250 fine in legal proceedings. The judge disregarded the prosecutor's recommendations for probation, community service, awareness training, and a restraining order prohibiting him from entering the museum where the incident occurred, stating that the attack 'was a crime committed not out of hatred, but out of love for the Virgin Mary'xiv.

Still in the United States, eco-activists who splattered paint not on the artwork itself but on the display case of the sculpture *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (by Edgar Degas, 1879-1881) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, in April 2023, are currently under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Art Crime Team. They face charges of "conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States" and damage to an exhibition or museum property, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. While these cases may not be directly comparable, and other factors are certainly at play, one can undoubtedly discern a form of strictness in the legal treatment accorded to these eco-activists.

Nonetheless, we can already observe a strong inclination among museums to pursue legal action against the eco-activists involved in this wave of actions. When we consider the discourse and actions that have followed the acts of civil resistance occurring in museums since the summer of 2022, we can lament the lack of attempts at dialogue from museums towards eco-activists. Some initiatives in this direction - albeit currently isolated - are nevertheless worth noting - even though the proposals that will be mentioned actually supplement repression and are far from replacing it at the moment.

Curatorial Strategies and Museum Counter-Proposals

Therefore, we propose, as a second step, to examine certain counter-proposals that museums - irrespective of direct implication in these actions - may have implemented. It seems pertinent here to present two examples.

A Few Degrees More, the Response from the Leopold Museum in Vienna

The first case study concerns the Leopold Museum in Vienna. On 15 November 2022, climate activists from the Austrian Letzte Generation group visited the museum, which was offering free admission on that day as part of Saint Leopold's Day, sponsored by the Austrian oil company OMV. The activists covered the protective glass of Gustav Klimt's painting *Death and Life* with black paint, denouncing the destruction of humanity by fossil fuels. In response, the Secretary of State for Culture, Andrea Mayer, stated that 'attacking artworks is definitely the wrong way to go'^{xv}. The museum's director asserted that the activists' demands were justified, yet cautioned that 'attacking works of art is not an appropriate course of action.'^{xvi}. In response to this action by Letzte Generation, the museum launched the *A Few Degrees More* initiative^{xvii}, which involved tilting fifteen landscape paintings by a few degrees. The aim of this initiative was to draw the public's attention to the effect of rising temperatures and the fact that the targets set by the Paris Agreements, which limit global warming to +1.5°C, have been exceeded. The initiative's slogan is 'a few degrees more will turn the world into an uncomfortable place'. Each painting is tilted in proportion to the rise in temperature that the landscape represented is likely to experience according to different IPCC scenarios, in conjunction with scientists from the Climate Change Center Austria, a partner in the project.

For example, *The Houses by the Sea* (Egon Schiele, 1914) is tilted by three degrees and accompanied by the following label: 'An increase of 3°C in the global average temperature would cause sea levels to rise by around 70 cm until 2100. While this might not sound like much, it would lead to a huge loss of inhabitable land mass, causing hundreds of millions of people to literally lose the ground beneath their feet. Schiele's *Houses by the Sea* – no matter where they might be situated – would be gone'^{xviii}.

Each wall label is accompanied by a series of proposals for measures to be implemented in order to address the situation. A range of issues are addressed, including the impact of rising sea levels, the increase and intensification of climatic events (floods, drought), and rising temperatures on land and in the oceans. The recommendations frequently address individuals, encouraging changes in consumption habits, the use of less carbon-intensive forms of transport, and the implementation of adaptation measures by towns and cities, such as the construction of dykes, the collection of water, and the creation of cooling islands. However, it is often stated that the most effective solution is the rapid reduction of CO₂ emissions, yet without ever indicating how this is to be achieved and with a use of the word 'we' that dilutes any form of responsibility. This stance is at odds with the activist actions of the A22 network, which are designed to shock, denounce the guilty and formulate a precise and systemic demand. It is also worth questioning the effects produced by the *A Few Degrees More* project and the dissonant articulation between alarming factual scientific information (millions of climate refugees), the range of solutions

proposed (building walls) and the very timid aesthetic gesture whose intended discomfort consists of making us tilt our heads by three degrees. We can really wonder about the impact of these proposals in comparison to those put forward by Letzte Generation activists.

The director of the Vienna museum described the initiative as a 'cautious intervention' designed to encourage other museums and galleries to become 'climate ambassadors'^{xix}. The spokeswoman for one of the German museums that participated in the initiative described in the following subsection, however, characterised it as a way of indicating that 'we are all for the same thing' but that 'dialogue is preferable'^{xx}. It is unclear what the real intentions are behind these institutional gestures. While their discourse tends to position those museums as agents of social change, it seems that they try above all to defuse possible actions against their works and thus better protect their collections.

'Without Climate Protection, No Protection of Cultural Assets', The Strategy of the Kunsthalle Hamburg

The second instance pertains to an initiative undertaken by a network of museums in Germany, supported by the German branch of ICOM, which involved inviting activists from Letzte Generation to conduct readings on climate change within their premises. On May 21, 2023, at the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, activists occupied the foyer of the Galerie der Gegenwart for a non-violent civil resistance in the form of a 'permanent reading', as part of an event titled 'Without Climate Protection, No Protection of Cultural Assets'. They shared scientific data on the climate crisis, including a speech by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, on what the future might hold if effective measures were not promptly implemented. Participants also engaged in conversations with museum visitors, who were also encouraged to participate, particularly through readings of essays and statements.

'These are themes that concern us all, and as a museum, we must create a space for them. Today, it is also about showing that climate protection and the protection of cultural assets go hand in hand'^{xxi}, explained Anja Gebauer, who coordinated the initiative at the Kunsthalle in Hamburg. A few weeks earlier, on March 29, 2023, an attempted action was carried out by activists from Letzte Generation concerning the painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (Caspar David Friedrich, 1818). The activists had tried to cover the painting with a reproduction reinterpreting the scene, depicting not a sea of fog over the forests of the Saxon Switzerland but smoke and flames - an allusion to the forest fires of the previous year in this region. Their attempt to affix the image to the protective glass of the

painting failed. The activists who carried out the action were brought to justice, but - not without ambivalence - the collective (which had warned the Kunsthalle that it would be the target of one of their actions) was able to express its demands in collaboration with the Kunsthalle shortly thereafter through the museum's invitation to this event.

On the occasion of the International Museum Day 2023, eight German museums collaborated with activists from Letzte Generation to initiate a dialogue on the theme of sustainability: similar events also took place at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, the Ethnological Museum in Leipzig, the Zeppelin Museum in Friedrichshafen, the Art Gallery in Rostock, the European Hanseatic Museum in Lübeck, and the Museum of Communication in Nuremberg. 'It is a very important step for us to work with museums'xxii, said Irma Trommer, an activist from Letzte Generation (quoted in an article entitled 'German Museums Take a New Tack to Prevent Climate Activists Attacking their Art Inviting Them in', an aptly title that prompts reflection on the real motivations of museums).

Regarding these initiatives (those of the Leopold Museum in Vienna and those of the eight German museums that collaborated with activists from Letzte Generation on the occasion of International Museum Day 2023), one might wonder whether this demonstrates a victory for eco-activists in widening the so-called Overton windowxxiii of acceptability of ideas, or if it represents on the contrary a form of institutional recuperation of this movement. The aforementioned German museums appear to have gone a step further in their reflection by setting up spaces for dialogue and collaboration with eco-activist collectives. Museums, in order to question their positions and practices, could, it seems to us, benefit from the expertise and commitment of actors from civil society: such avenues for exploration certainly merit further investigation. The third and final part of this article offers some elements aimed at contributing to the necessary reflection on practices and the potential evolution of museum institutions.

Greening Museums: Technical or Cultural Issues?

'What is worth more, art or life? [...] Are you more concerned about protecting a painting or protecting our planet and our people?' The actions of the A22 network challenge the deeply flawed and ecologically destructive notion that the products of culture are inherently more valuable than the forms of nature that inspire them. In light of the activists' question posed in front of *The Sunflowers* (Vincent Van Gogh, 1887), we propose in a third stage a reflection on the conservation of works of art in a context where the urgent need is to preserve the conditions in which the Earth can be inhabited.

Questioning Our Value Systems and (Re)learning to See

The actions of these activists demonstrate that the ecological crisis is undermining the modern system of values, which is based on a separation and hierarchisation of nature and culture. In the western world, one has learned to appreciate and care for works of art to a greater extent than we do for our ecosystems.

Actually, this falsely naïve opposition between art and life points to what Baptiste Morizot and Estelle Zhong Mengualxxiv have called a crisis of sensitivity. For these authors, the current ecological crisis is in fact a crisis in our modern apparatus of perception, a reduction in the range of affects, percepts and concepts linking us to living things. This impoverishment is crucially evident in our reflections on the aesthetic appreciation of nature and, ultimately, its preservation. We feel outraged when a (protected) work of art to which we attach a high symbolic and monetary value is damaged, or when a cathedral catches fire, but we have to admit that the collapse of biodiversity does not arouse as much emotion or mobilization. This returns us to Jacques Rancière's concept of the sharing of the sensitive, according to which the range of what enters the space of collective attention is always constructed by a society. In this regard, through their actions, these activists are contributing to a movement that is bringing back issues that had been excluded from everyday political attention. These actions are an invitation to extend our regime of attention and care beyond the museum walls. Consequently, it is not a matter of ceasing to view the works, or even worse, destroying them. Rather, it is a matter of recalling that there is no culture on a dead planet.

The Environmental Impact of Collections

Let us return to our paintings. Resistant to attacks by fluids of all kinds, watertight protective glass is proof of the mastery of conservation conditions for works of art in our museums. This Western science, which was born barely fifty years ago, makes climate control 'one of the key points of conservation', according to the vademecum of preventive conservation from the French Museums Research and Restoration Centre^{xxv}. Consequently, 'museums have become sites for micro-experiments in climate control, the energy cost of which can be quantified by the inventory of the necessary infrastructures: thermo-hygrographs, psychrometers, heating systems and control, humidification systems, air conditioning, etc.'^{xxvi}

As pointed out by the French think tank for the energy transition The Shift Project^{xxvii}, acquiring and conserving works of art therefore involves flows of energy and people, generates travel, and requires the construction of buildings that must then be maintained in appropriate climatic conditions. Despite their symbolic value, the works conserved have

a tangible material impact. The growing number of carbon footprints produced by museums and exhibitions over the last few months and years has highlighted the material impact of these activities and identified potential avenues for action, both in terms of professional practices and the standards that govern them.

Firstly, action must be taken with regard to transport, acquisitions and loans, as these are the sectors that contribute the most to CO2 emissions. This can be achieved by reducing distances, pooling journeys, using digital transport and decarbonising transport. Measures that have been trialled by the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille, for example, during the Goya exhibition in 2022, demonstrate the potential for reducing emissions in these sectors. It is recommended that the packaging of works of art be rationalised, as is being done by the International School of Art Logistics (Eiloo), which has launched a research programme on eco-packaging. Furthermore, it is proposed that conservation standards be made more flexible by introducing wider climatic ranges, as supported by the Bizot group, a group of curators from major international museums^{xxviii}. Another proposal is to renovate buildings or rethink the use of spaces according to the seasons to reduce energy consumption. This proposal is made by the Palais de Tokyo in its Short Treatise on Institutional Permaculture^{xxix}. These are both ethical and preventive measures designed to ensure that institutions are robust in the face of the risks they run. We have already experienced the health risks, as well as the energy risks, which have, for example, forced some museums to reduce the number of hours they are open to the public, or even to consider moving when the bills are too high and energy renovation is difficult to envisage. However, anticipating climatic risks, such as the increased frequency and intensity of adverse weather events, such as floods, can also have an environmental cost when it leads to the construction of new buildings and the relocation of works to better protect collections. This is exemplified by the Louvre, which transferred part of its collections to Liévin in 2019. A total of 18,500 square metres of storage space has been constructed to accommodate 250,000 works, the majority of which were previously stored in areas prone to flooding.

Nevertheless, the relocation of collections, which contributes to the artificialisation of the land and increases the distances between conservation and exhibition sites, is more often the result of a lack of storage space linked to the constant increase in the size of collections than an anticipation of climatic risks. For example, the collections of the National Center for Visual Arts were relocated to Pantin, and those of the Centre Pompidou to Massy, in the suburbs of Paris. It is also worth considering whether the enrichment and conservation of collections are truly compatible with the challenges of sobriety. Even if we are virtuous in practising all the aforementioned actions, enriching collections on an ongoing basis is one of the permanent missions of museums in France.

Freeing Ourselves from Objects Rather Than Accumulating Them? Material Degrowth and Cultural Change

Many museologists are perplexed by the accumulation of works, the multiplication of reserves, and the impossibility of managing unlimited collections. Furthermore, there is a growing discrepancy between the size of collections and exhibition capacity. For instance, the Centre Pompidou exhibits less than 5% of its collections. In this context, it seems inevitable that we will have to consider the possibility of a shift towards a more minimalist approach to curation, whereby the ultimate form of curatorial activism might be one that fundamentally questions our relationship with objects and eventually stops acquiring and conserving works.

The relationship between humans and objects, and the cultural context in which this relationship is situated, is of great significance. Some cultures may have a much stronger connection with the past than in Western countries, a value placed on transmission rather than innovation, and innovation that does not necessarily involve the conservation of material evidence, and even less so in the museum modexxx. Perhaps the initial step is to move away from the prevailing narrative of modernity, which places a premium on innovation and infinite growth, and which, in its relentless pursuit of power, has ultimately led us to exceed the planetary limits – the very limits that allow us to existxxx. Consequently, if we consider museums to be players in this cultural transformation, then we need to rethink the modern precepts on which they are based, both in their organisation and in their social function.

Furthermore, as art historian Bénédicte Savoyxxxii elucidates, the accumulation of objects, the production of knowledge, and the fantasy of universal domination are inextricably linked in the West. It is therefore pertinent to inquire whether, given that the preoccupation with accumulation and conservation in our contemporary industrial societies is a reflection of the capitalist ethos, the museum might not be the illusory antidote to a mercantile and extractivist society that is destroying any relationship with the past and any possibility of a future.

It is not a matter of halting all acquisition and conservation, but rather of rethinking them in terms of the uses to which they are put, rather than the heritage itself. In other words, we must consider the necessity of preserving it for present-day communities, and therefore also potentially removing it from storage and integrating it into everyday life. This would, for example, permit the reinvention of low-tech practices by reviving the know-how, objects and vernacular uses of the past. This renewed relationship with conservation and objects would then require a review of the status of collections and their

inalienability, a principle which has existed since the Ancien Régime and applies in particular to the collections of public museums.

In conclusion, as the philosopher Baptiste Morizot^{xxxiii} reminds us, the act of living is to inherit, but more precisely, it is to activate, evade, or favour certain legacies. Consequently, when contemplating renewal and constructing narratives to be inherited by future generations, it is essential to prioritize resolution. This entails collectively determining the manner in which we wish to utilise our legacies, the aspects of our past we wish to preserve, and the manner in which we wish to convey them. In an unprecedented context, where the risk of losing the most vital conservation battle, that of the planet's habitability, is imminent, this resolution is of paramount importance.

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