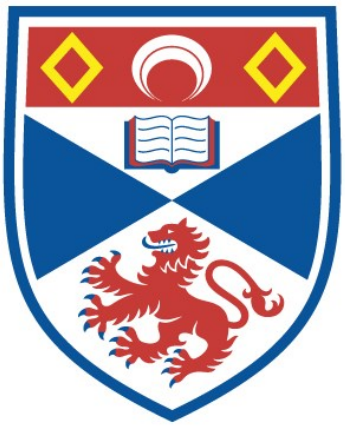
"Ars longa, vita brevis": theological reflections on the "provisional immortality" of art

Tanya L. Walker

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with human finitude and the desire for immortality as it is reflected in the response to aesthetic finitude. The fields of art history, conservation, and theology are brought into conversation in order to test the hypothesis that the manner in which aesthetic mortality is addressed mirrors in many significant respects humanity's response to its own mortality; to reflect upon the theological implications of the interrelated denials of human and aesthetic finitudes; and to consider the analogical potential of the provisional immortality of art to model an approach to human finitude in light of the Christian eschatological narrative.

To accomplish this, chapter one broadly considers the religious and non-religious frameworks through which humans respond to mortality and seek immortality. It considers two paradigms—one which posits the existence of life after death and the other which assumes death's finality—in order to show how a persistent desire for continuity undergirds humanity's response to transience. Accordingly, it considers the emergence of immortality substitutes and the influence of scientific developments on changing expectations of human mortality and immortality before examining broad correspondence in humanity's response to aesthetic finitude.

To further understand the relationship between aesthetic perdurance and human finitude, chapter two considers the mortality and immortality of art in two parts: first it examines the complex physical, cultural and aesthetic factors that affect the work of art's endurance in order to show that aesthetic permanence is culturally and circumstantially contingent; second it examines art's perceived capacity to transcend finitude through individual, displaced, or intimated immortality and correlates this with human longings for permanence.

In chapter three these issues are explored in greater depth through two case studies of consciously staged aesthetic finitude: the intentionally and intrinsically ephemeral art of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and Andy Goldsworthy, respectively. Three areas are considered: the artists' reasons for and responses to their works' finitude, others' responses to the same, and documentation's ability to provide surrogate perdurance to ephemeral works of art. The chapter concludes that the inherent limitations of documentation only allow a compromised form of continuing aesthetic existence and require the diminution of a work's particularities.

Finally, chapter four draws together the parallel manifestations of denial of death and aesthetic finitude and considers them through a theological lens. It examines the consequences of denial, giving particular attention to the significance of embodiment and temporality in human experience, before proposing an analogical aesthetic model of the Christian narrative that affirms immortality as a divine gift from without.

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Deus spes nostra.

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Introduction

I. Context

Death has been represented in art throughout the span of human history.[1] In *Art and Death*, Chris Townsend explores seven twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists who have addressed death in and through their work.[2] As their work evidences, death as subject matter offers rich fodder for reflection on humanity's intersection with finitude individually, culturally, and theologically. While the aesthetic treatment of death reveals much about our response to human finitude, the manner in which the finitude of the medium of exploration (art) is addressed is equally revelatory. This thesis shall consider the latter.

In 1993, artist Sandi Gold labored diligently for three months in the gallery space of the Westerly Public Library in Rhode Island to produce a nearly 60-foot mural.[3] On the first day of the New Year, Gold washed away the pastels with which she had drawn the mural's scenes, before finally hiding any remnants with a fresh coat of wall paint.[4] The mural had been on display to the public for only one month before the artist deliberately destroyed it. Gold agreed to make the commissioned work with the caveat that it would be temporary: she stipulated, "'Only if it can be erased, because life is temporary.'" Gold's conviction arose from a personal brush with death less than a decade earlier. What makes Gold's story unique, and in this instance newsworthy, is the intentional erasure of her mural—an unexpected and undesired anomaly to most viewers. Gold's action is, however, typical of those artists who choose to reflect the finite experiences of human existence through the impermanence of their work. Gold intended aesthetic finitude to mirror human finitude. Journalist Frieda Squires summarized Gold's perspective: "since life is short, art should also be short, to force people to experience it to the fullest while they can."[5] In this way, a thing's value would be found not in its longevity, but in Gold's words,

[1] Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008), 1.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Frieda Squires, "An Encounter with Mortality Breathes New Life into Art," *New York Times*, January 2, 1994, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/02/us/an-encounter-with-mortality-breathes-new-life-into-art.html.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

in "depth of appreciation."[6] Through this aesthetic embodiment of human transience, Gold asks the viewer to consider whether a thing's finitude negates, diminishes, or increases its value. In other words, wherein lies the value of something that does not last? As she discovered, people's responses to the planned erasure varied: some (including these who were "terminally ill") expressed sympathetic agreement with her decision; others asked her "to let the mural remain."[7]

Gold's approach reorders the familiar aphorism, "ars longa, vita brevis" (art is long, life is short); although a reinterpretation of its original meaning, the phrase is sometimes used to contrast art's endurance with life's transience.[8] The anomaly of her work's ephemerality draws attention to deeply imbedded cultural expectations regarding art's permanence that are perpetuated by the preservation of art. Aesthetic artifacts are recognized as one means by which we come to know about people and cultures that no longer exist. Accordingly, art appears to provide both a record of and a surrogate existence for finite beings. Works of art have been seen thus both as an expression of the desire for continuity or immortality, and a means of achieving it, in the midst of transient human existence. Yet art's immortality is only ever provisional. While the problem of aesthetic finitude is widely recognized in the field of conservation, the desire for art's perdurance often seems to result—although not always, as Gold demonstrates—in a subtle denial of finitude. In many ways, the response to aesthetic finitude appears to mirror the response to human finitude. Is our response to aesthetic finitude a manifestation of our response to human finitude? How is the one reflected in the other? In chapters one and two, respectively, we will investigate the above contentions by analyzing the frameworks through which human and aesthetic finitudes have been addressed. In chapter three we will examine a particular form of aesthetic finitude through two case studies: the ephemeral art of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and Andy Goldsworthy. Of course human and aesthetic mortalities are only one half of the picture. Longings for permanence, which are reflected in both religious and aesthetic frameworks of immortality, will be explored in chapters one through three as well. Chapter four will then consider these issues through a theological lens, using art's provisional immortality as an analogue for the

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] This is a more recent secondary meaning. John Simpson and Jennifer Speake, eds., "Art is long and life is short," in *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, Oxford University Press, 2008, accessed September 24, 2013. http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199539536.001.0001/acref-9780199539536-e-65.

broader human situation: what does it reveal about the nature of human existence? How should we understand and respond to art's capacity for immortality in light of both human and aesthetic finitudes? What might be gained by holding mortality and immortality in tension? In summary, this thesis will test the hypothesis that art's perdurance is both a mechanism for ameliorating human finitude and an expression of human aspirations to immortality but through means which, by nature, can only be provisional. We will consider how this provisional nature of aesthetic immortality might provide a helpful analogical framework through which to approach human finitude in light of the Christian eschatological narrative.

The topics of aesthetic mortality and immortality as they concern the finitude of the medium are of perennial concern to artists and those engaged in the fields of art history, curation, and conservation, but they appear (in print at least) to be of less relative interest to those in theology. However, some theologians have mined aesthetic offerings for their eschatological insights, such as Richard Bauckham and Paul Fiddes: in "Time, Eternity and the Arts" Bauckham discusses the paintings of Claude Monet and the novel *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, while Fiddes focuses on the literary arts in *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*.[9] Others consider the destiny of art in God's eternal kingdom, but primarily as justification for its present-day importance. The most focused treatment in this approach is by a non-theologian: *Plowing in Hope: Towards a Biblical Theology of Culture* by David Bruce Hegeman.[10] Both Bauckham and Hegeman's contributions will be discussed briefly in chapter two.

While many recognize that there are connections between aesthetic finitude and broader concerns of transience in the human experience, a theological voice is often absent from these discussions within the fields of art history and conservation.[11] The provisional immortality of art is largely viewed and discussed through a non-religious lens. In past centuries, Christianity provided one framework through which

[9] Richard Bauckham, "Time, Eternity and the Arts," in *Art, Imagination and Christian Hope: Patterns of Promise*, eds. Trevor A. Hart, Gavin Hopps, and Jeremy Begbie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Fiddes, Paul S., *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

[10] David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture*, rev. ed. (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2004).

[11] For instance, see Mary O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art: Mourning and Loss," in *(Im)permanence: Cultures in/out of Time*, eds. Judith Schachter and Stephen Brockman (Pittsburgh, PA: Center for the Arts in Society / Carnegie Mellon University, 2008).

human finitude, explicitly, and aesthetic finitude, implicitly, were understood. Former director of the Getty Conservation Institute, Miguel Angel Corzo, notes the contrast:

> For medieval societies, the important thing was eternity — time outside time — and the past. Medieval men and women did not believe in the future; they knew very well that the world was condemned to extinction. The point was to save one's soul and not to try to save the world. Is there some lesson to be learned from this? Is contemporary art only for contemporary times? Does it need to exist beyond our time? What is the life of a work of art?[12]

Corzo's observations and questions highlight the important intersection of worldview and expectations for perdurance, both human and aesthetic. Although issues of aesthetic finitude touch upon important human concerns that extend beyond aesthetic considerations, in contemporary Western society they are often addressed without reference to a religious framework. While there are the occasional interjections of Buddhist perspectives on transience, these are introduced primarily in contrast to dominant Western practices of conservation.[13] The perceived irrelevance of a theological or religious perspective is evident in the professions listed for the "thirty-four invited speakers" at the 1998 Getty Conservation Institute Conference, "Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art":[14] "artists, conservators, museum directors, curators, art historians, educators, philosophers, collectors, dealers, scientists, and lawyers."[15] No theologian or religious perspective made the guest list. Through this thesis we hope to open one door to future conversations between theologians and these other interested parties.

II. Scope

Human and aesthetic mortality and immortality are broad subjects with long histories and numerous, significant permutations. However, the length of this thesis does not permit an exhaustive analysis of these; therefore, it will not attempt to do so. Instead, we will select key points of contact between the two that lay the framework for a dialogue that can be continued and deepened through future research. While references will be made to non-Western and non-visual aesthetic practices and

[12] Miguel Angel Corzo, introduction to *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art*, ed. Miguel Angel (Corzo Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1999), xix.
[13] Examples of this will be discussed in chapter two.
[14] Mildred Constantine, preface to Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, ix.
[15] Ibid.

perspectives, the scope of this thesis is primarily limited to an exploration of Western visual (non-performance-based) art and conservation practices and the utilization of theologians and biblical scholars who write, for the most part, from a Protestant perspective. While many of the observations and conclusions will be broadly applicable to performance or non-visual forms of art (music, dance, theatre, etcetera), these genres bring additional complexities that cannot be adequately addressed within this limited treatment of the subject of aesthetic finitude and immortality; thus, they are omitted.

III. Terminology

Throughout this thesis a number of words are frequently used interchangeably to refer to states of existence or activities, which are closely related to one another. In particular, these are the following: "conservation" and "preservation"; "perdurance", "endurance", "permanence", "persistence", and "immortality"; "mortality", "death", "impermanence", "finitude", and in some instances, "ephemerality". The fluidity with which these are sometimes employed is due in part to the complexity of the subjects of human and aesthetic mortality and immortality, the inadequacy of a single word to describe the topic under consideration, and the corresponding fluidity with which they are often used in the literature. Of course subtle or foundational differences between these terms are significant in some contexts;[16] for many of our considerations, however, these nuances will not be critical.

[16] For instance, see Muñoz Viñas's and Schadler-Saub's delineations of terms related to conservation in regard to their complexity and varied usage: Salvador Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (London: Routledge, 2011), 7-25; Ursula Schädler-Saub, introduction to *Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art: Reflections on the Roots and the Perspectives*, eds. Ursula Schädler-Saub and Angela Weyer (London: Archetype, 2010) 4-5. For "perdurance" versus "endurance" see Katherine Hawley, "Temporal Parts," in *the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2015 ed., ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed May 2, 2016, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/temporal-parts/.

Chapter 1

Between Finite and Eternal: Human Mortality and Immortality

> *It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.*
> —Eccles. 7:2 (NIVUK)

I. Awareness of Human Finitude

If anything could be said to shape significantly the human experience, it is the inescapable certainty of death. Sharing his personal thoughts, historian John McManners writes: "The knowledge that we must die gives us our perspective for living, our sense of finitude, our conviction of the value of every moment, our determination to live in such a fashion that we transcend our tragic limitation."[1] In Ecclesiastes, it is the indispensible grounding for Qoheleth's meditations on life.[2] Theologian Jürgen Moltmann declares: "All human life draws towards death. This fact is unalterable. It is the fact that we must die which distinguishes us from the immortal gods; the fact that we know it which distinguishes us from animals."[3] Martin Heidegger recognized its centrality to his phenomenological inquiry of being; human existence must be understood in relation to it, as "Being-towards-death".[4] Regardless of culture, geographic location, economic status, or historic period, all human beings are confronted by their finitude. "Death", as John Donne reminds us, "comes equally to us all".[5] This awareness of our own transience is a life-shaping reality, our response to which reflects both our understanding of the nature of death and our beliefs regarding its finality.[6] Accordingly, finitude also influences our perception of a

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[1] John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 2.

[2] Fredericks, Daniel C., *Coping with Transience: Ecclesiastes on the Brevity of Life* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 33.

[3] Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – the Beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 2004) 119. Allan Kellehear disputes the latter distinction: Allan Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511481352, 15, 60-61.

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (1962; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 236-267.

[5] *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 7th ed., ed. Elizabeth Knowles (Oxford University Press, 2009), s.v. "John Donne," doi: 10.1093/acref/9780199237173.001.0001.

[6] Moltmann aptly states: "Our attitudes to life and our plans for living always reflect our attitudes to death." Moltmann, *In the End*, 119.

thing's value. The publisher Cassell has made the most of this situation, launching a series of books that lightheartedly exploit life's brevity. For example:

1001: Buildings You Must See before You Die

1001: Paintings You Must See before You Die

1001: Albums You Must Hear before You Die

1001:Whiskies You Must Try before You Die

1001: Walks You Must Experience before You Die[7]

While some might dispute particular selections or rankings, most would probably agree that the limiting nature of death increases the importance or value of certain things. Thus, Sigmund Freud argued regarding the impact of transience, "Limitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment."[8] Moreover, as Keats observes in "Ode on Melancholy", it is through the recognition of something's finitude that its deeply poignant value is revealed:

> She [Melancholy] dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding Adieu; […]
>
> Ay, in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
> Thought seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
> Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine […].[9]

Yet even a single lifetime would be likely insufficient to experience every "must see" that Cassell recommends since the above list comprises but a few titles in their "*Before You Die*" canon. Indeed, the marked temporal limitations of life, and consequently of opportunity, are often all too apparent. Keats, who died at the young age of 25, likewise hung the inherent tension of this realization upon the word

[7] Mark Irving, *1001: Buildings You Must See before You Die* (London: Cassell, 2012); Stephen Farthing, *1001: Paintings You Must See before You Die* (London: Cassell, 2011); Robert Dimery, *1001: Albums You Must Hear before You Die* (London: Cassell, 2013); Dominic Roskrow, *1001: Whiskies You Must Try before You Die* (London: Cassell, 2012); Barry Stone, *1001: Walks You Must Experience before You Die* (London: Cassell, 2015).

[8] Sigmund Freud, "Our Attitude toward Death," in vol. 14 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 305.

[9] John Keats, *Keats's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts and Criticism*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox, Norton Critical Editions (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 474.

"before" in the first stanza of his poem "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be":[10]

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
> Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,
> Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain […][11]

With the passage of years, the awareness of temporal finitude only grows. Psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton describes "middle adulthood" as the general period in which one fully realizes "that the limitations of physiology and life spans will not permit the full accomplishment of all one's projects."[12] George Pattison similarly observes that the potential of Heidegger's Dasein could never be achieved without "an infinite expanse of time".[13] He remarks, "Death as we know cuts each of us short. Some are able to live in such a way as to fulfill sufficient of their possibilities to be able to go towards death as if to completion, but few really do so."[14] Moreover, some are never even given the chance. Recognizing this, Moltmann queries how those whose young lives are tragically lost—"the beloved child who died at birth, the little boy run over when he was four, the 16-year-old friend torn to pieces at your side by the bomb that left you unscathed"—can achieve meaning if death is all there is.[15]

Humanity is also surrounded by intimations of mortality in its experience of the natural world: change, transience, and loss are ubiquitous in the fabric of the cosmos. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins aptly captures these intersections of impermanence in "Spring and Fall: to a Young Child":

> Margaret, are you grieving
> Over Goldengrove unleaving?
> Leaves, like the things of man, you
> With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
> Ah! as the heart grows older
> It will come to such sights colder
> By and by, nor spare a sigh
> Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;

---

[10] Keats, *Poetry and Prose*, 118.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Robert J. Lifton, "The Sense of Immortality: On Death and the Continuity of Life," in *New Meanings of Death*, ed. Herman Feifel (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 282.

[13] George Pattison, "Death," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern*, eds. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 204.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Moltmann, *In the End*, 116. Similarly, Albert Camus realized he must address the "problem of suicide" if one accepts that life is absurd—that is, without terminal meaning. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (1955; repr. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960), 7, 11-13.

And yet you *will* weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What héart héard of, ghóst guéssed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.[16]

Furthermore, in an age in which the topic of climate change has moved center stage, uncertainty about the stability of humanity's earthly habitation adds another dimension of apparent fragility to human existence.[17]

Thus, the stage is set for the realization that life is finite. This awareness prompts numerous responses, each one colored by presuppositions regarding the finality of death—that is, whether or not one believes in the continuation of life beyond it. Moreover, judgments about something's value are, to a large degree, shaped by these assumptions. In the West, both Christianity and science have influenced expectations regarding death and material transience and informed our response to finitude, wherever it is encountered. Largely characterized by the desire to transcend or overcome it, this response is manifest not only as a reaction to human limitations but aesthetic ones as well.

II. Death is *Not* the End: Afterlife Beliefs

While death's ubiquity has been universally assumed, its finality has not. Of course, there have always been some who have believed that death was *the* end of existence, but W.M. Spellman maintains that the number of adherents to this view throughout history is "relatively small" when compared with the number that have made "claims

[16] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Selected Poems*. Ed. Peter Feeney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.)

[17] Many things can foster this cultural ethos of instability and concern. For instance, Al Gore's book (and Academy Award-winning film) on climate change enjoyed significant cultural prominence: Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Rodale Books, 2006). More recently, the lead statement of a 2015 BBC news article highlighted the specifically human consequences of climate change: "The Earth has entered a new period of extinction, a study by three US universities has concluded, and humans could be among the first casualties." BBC, "Earth 'Entering New Extinction Phase' – US Study," *BBC News*, June 20, 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-33209548. In the 1970s, Lifton had already noted the increased "imagery of extinction" resulting from post-Holocaust "threats posed by nuclear weapons, environmental destruction, and the press of rising population against limited resources". Robert J. Lifton, "The Sense of Immortality: On Death and the Continuity of Life," in *New Meanings of Death*, ed. Herman Feifel (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 279-80.

on behalf of some form of continuity" beyond death.[18] Indeed, Allan Kellehear describes the "anticipation of further life beyond biological death" as the "most important enduring feature of human dying": an expectation he traces back to our Stone Age ancestors.[19] Douglas Davies agrees: "the history of death is very largely one in which people have shared a belief in some sort of life after death. While individuals may have completely disbelieved in any such thing, it has been exceptional for any society not to have held to such a view."[20] Alan F. Segal also confirms its universality as a concept throughout the history of human culture.[21] This continuation of existence, however, has taken a myriad of forms.[22]

For many of the earliest cultures, dying was to embark on an "otherworldly journey" for which the living provided the dead their needed provisions.[23] The funerary practices of the ancient Egyptians supply one familiar image of such accommodation. The Egyptians not only assumed that there was an afterlife, but that, at death, they would need the assistance of the living to navigate it successfully. A. Rosalie David summarizes their practices:

> A basic religions belief […that] was held regardless of the status of the deceased was the concept that life continued after death. The form which this hereafter was thought to take varied according to the social position of the deceased, but for all classes there were two essential requirements. First, the deceased had to be provided with the necessary equipment for a continued existence after death. This ranged in quality and quantity […]. Apart from items of everyday use, much attention was paid to providing a continuing food supply for the deceased […].
>
> The Egyptians believed that the vital force of the deceased continued after death to be tied in some way to this world, and although it could pass eternity in another form of existence elsewhere it still needed to return to the tomb periodically to obtain sustenance from the food supplies placed there. It was considered that, for the spirit to partake of the food and drink, it was necessary

[18] W. M. Spellman, *A Brief History of Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 9-10.
[19] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 26. See also 27.
[20] Douglas J. Davies, *A Brief History of Death* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 13.
[21] Segal, Alan F., *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 15, 699.
[22] Spellman summarizes these: "These claims have involved, most prominently, the unending journey of the immaterial soul as first articulated in ancient Greece, the prospect of bodily resurrection as emphasized in later Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, the widely embraced South Asian principle of reincarnation as someone or something else, and East Asian, African and indigenous North American understandings of the role of ancestors in the ongoing affairs of the terrestrial world – the interconnectedness of the two spheres. Western traditions are typically framed in terms of personal immortality, while in general South and East Asian perspectives see individual consciousness dissolving after death and returning to an all-pervasive, impersonal being, the creative force of the universe." Spellman, *Brief History of Death*, 10.
[23] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 27-29, 36.

> to preserve the body of the deceased in as perfect and lifelike a condition as possible. This was the second essential requirement of funerary preparation.[24]

In this instance, the need for perpetual provision tied the dead to the living; accordingly, any neglect of responsibility would result in dire consequences for the spirit of the deceased.[25] The dead, however, were not left without recourse. To avoid this catastrophic outcome, other "symbolic" and "magical" means of obtaining the necessary supplies were employed: tomb art provided scenes of sustenance, which, like the body, could be animated to meet these ongoing needs.[26]

While the Egyptians viewed the body as equally important to afterlife existence, for Plato the immortal soul took priority over its temporary and inferior corporeal habitation.[27] Separating from it at death, the pre-existent soul survived the body.[28] The soul's apparent preeminence was, as N.T. Wright explains, an inevitable product of Plato's emphasis on the "ontological significance" of the Forms; consequently, attention to the visible world—and therefore the body—was less important than "the nurture of the soul".[29] Likewise, gnosticism's denigration of both the body and matter—"the immortal […] soul imprisoned in the unsuitable body"—was but a further outworking of such views.[30]

II. a. Christianity: Paradigm of Death and Resurrection

In the West, Christianity became the dominant paradigm by which death and the afterlife were understood, albeit not without the influence or traces of both Greek and Jewish thought.[31] Most significantly, Christianity offered the dead the hope of a future

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[24] A. Rosalie David, *The Ancient Egyptians: Religious Beliefs and Practices* (1982; repr., London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1986), 37-38. See also 76-78.

[25] David notes that neglect was not uncommon even when land (for food) had been set aside for this purpose. Ibid., 79-80.

[26] Ibid., 80,85.

[27] Segal, *Life after Death*, 225; N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 48-49.

[28] Segal, *Life after Death*, 225-27; Wright, *Resurrection*, 48-49.

[29] Ibid., 51.

[30] Ibid., 52. "Matter itself was […] not redeemable." Segal, *Life after Death*, 539.

[31] Both the Platonic conception of the soul and the Pharisaic views of resurrection have been influential to varying degrees in Christian articulations of the nature of death and eternal life. Segal, *Life after Death*, 224; Wright, *Resurrection*, 477. For instance, Wolfhart Pannenberg notes that from "the 3rd century onward, under the influence of Platonism, the idea of an immortality of the soul by nature gained support in theology and even became normative, as a result especially of the influence of Gregory of Nyssa in the East and Augustine in the West." Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 221. Pattison also notes the intersection with Platonic conceptions of the soul. Pattison, "Death", 193-94.

bodily resurrection: a reversal of death's finality and a cancellation of its previously unlimited power.[32] Wright describes this expectation as an essential feature of the apostle Paul's perspective and teaching.[33] The unsurprising effect of this re-characterization of death was a re-assessment of life's end in victorious terms. Phillipe Ariès captures well the sense of this significant change in perception: "Ever since the risen Christ triumphed over death, the fact of being born into this world is the real death, and physical death is access to eternal life. Thus, the Christian is urged to look forward to death with joy, as if to a new birth."[34] The art of the early church reflected these new realities. In particular, it emphasized the triumphant outcome of the passion narrative. Early centuries omitted imagery of the crucifixion itself altogether;[35] Jesus was primarily portrayed "as victorious over death but not undergoing death."[36] In fact, until the seventh century, images of a crucified Christ were largely absent.[37] When such imagery did appear, Christ was primarily depicted "on the cross with open eyes and a physically robust stance",[38] emphasizing the fact that he was "alive and in triumph".[39] Thus, it was the hope of the resurrection that figured prominently in early aesthetic practices.[40] Images of a suffering, crucified Christ would come much later—not as a dismissal of resurrection hope but as an affirmation of the incarnation or an affective subject for meditation during the Good Friday liturgy.[41] Viewed through the lens of divine "salvific power manifested in the resurrection" the cross no longer solely functioned as a symbol of execution and death.[42] Instead it became, as Viladesau notes, "the event and the sign […] of God's

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[32] Wright, *Resurrection*, 372.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Philipe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (London: Peregrine Books, 1987), 13.

[35] R. Kevin Seasoltz, *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art* (New York: Continuum, 2005) 107. Many explanations for this surprising omission have been offered. Ibid., 108. However, this is not to say that imagery of the cross was absent entirely; a cross might be "held by Jesus as a sign of triumph" or bejewelled to indicate "the victory won by the cross". Ibid. 109-10. For additional examples see Richard Viladesau, *The Beauty of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. doi: 10.1093/019518811X.001.0001, 44. Viladesau further describes the "*crux gemata*" as the linking of "the instrument of death to the triumph of the resurrection." Ibid.

[36] Seasoltz, *Sense of the Sacred*, 107.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid, 109.

[39] Richard Viladesau, *Beauty of the Cross*, 48.

[40] Seasoltz, *Sense of the Sacred*, 114.

[41] Viladesau, *Beauty of the Cross*, 48, 52.

[42] Ibid., 36.

triumphant glory."[43] Certainly, this transposition from symbol of death to symbol of victory marks a dramatic shift in expectation regarding death's power and finality.

Given this shift, it is not surprising that rescue and divine triumph became prominent themes in early Christian art.[44] In particular, the experiences of Jonah—a frequent subject in catacomb art—served as a visual metaphor for "salvation through the waters of baptism, dying, and rising with Christ."[45] In addition, various biblical "types", such as Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, the widow's son, and the "dry bones" of Ezekiel, provided imagery for the anticipated "corporal or fleshly resurrection" of which Christ was the "prototype".[46] Because Christ through his resurrection was victor over death the believer could also anticipate eternal benefits from his triumph:[47] "'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'"[48] Hence, in these ways, the content of early Christian art mirrored new expectations regarding human finitude.

Of course, throughout the history of Christianity there have been numerous—and sometimes conflicting—articulations of the nature of eternal life, both popular and scholarly. Diverse theological arguments have been assembled to support these varied emphases, which center on the nature, importance, relationship, and destiny of both body and soul (or spirit), as well as the fate of the earth.[49] For example, N.T. Wright argues that believers can expect to enjoy "a full, recreated life in the presence

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[43] Ibid.,
[44] Ibid., 43.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Seasoltz, *Sense of the Sacred*, 114.
[47] Ibid., 110.
[48] 1 Cor. 15:55 NIV
[49] For instance, Davies contrasts the previously more unified theology of "the immortality of the soul" between Protestants and Catholics with the twenty-century shift by Protestants to a greater "emphasis on the resurrection of the body". Douglas J. Davies, *The Theology of Death* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 31, 52. Pattison draws attention to D.Z. Phillips argument in *Death and Immortality* (1970) "that belief in post-mortem survival is not integral to Christian belief in immortality". Pattison, "Death," 197. Polkinghorne marries contemporary science and theology in his discussion of the earth's destiny: "science presents us with the picture of a universe that, despite its present fruitfulness, will eventually end in the futility of cosmic collapse or decay. This reliable prediction poses a question to theology concerning how the latter conceives of the ultimate fulfilment of God's creation." Polkinghorne, J. C., *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (London: SPCK, 2002) xiv. Other contemporary theologians also focus on the interrelated destiny of a redeemed (and resurrected) humanity and a renewed or new earth, exploring both continuity and discontinuity with the present one: N.T. Wright, *New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of the Christian Hope* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 2002); Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History*, 4th ed., trans. Lambertus. Buurman (London: SCM, 1966); Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 49, no. 3 (2006): 448-88, EBSCOhost; Miraslov Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

and love of God, a totally renewed creation, an integrated new heavens and new earth, and a complete humanness".[50] In contrast, Rosemary Radford Ruether reorients the Christian hope to embrace individual human finitude as innate and lasting; she argues for collective rather than personal continuation:

> we are upheld and sustained by a larger matrix of life and renewal of life. Everything that lives and dies goes back into this matrix and is reborn in and through it. Our dreams and accomplishments live on through the collective memory of our communities through which insurgent hope is continually reborn. In ways that we can neither understand nor guarantee, this matrix of life and the renewal of life are also God for us and with us. Thus we can approach our own mortality with trust that all that we have accomplished will live on in God from whom comes the power of continually insurgent faith in the possibility of better futures. In this larger whole lies our hope.[51]

While Wright and Ruether reach very different conclusions regarding the fulfilment of Christian hope, both offer reassurance that death does not nullify the value or continuity of this life's activities, which appear bound to our present finitude. Thus, Wright affirms: "what we do […] is not wasted. It will last all the way into God's new world."[52] This equation of value with lastingness is a persistent theme that will re-emerge throughout our discussion of finitude.

Some have specifically responded to the presuppositions of Platonism. For instance, John Polkinghorne makes it clear that he regards the soul as neither material nor immortal and emphasizes the necessity of divine action to achieve post-mortem existence: the "information bearing pattern" that encompasses the "real me" must be preserved and re-embodied *by God*.[53] In other words, the body, which undergoes constant change throughout life and then decays, continues after death only through a divine act of resurrection.[54] Moltmann similarly rejects what he sees as deficiencies in the Platonic understanding of the soul, proposing instead that human immortality is located *in God*;[55] in particular he argues that it is the whole person—the entirety of a unique lived experience—that is relationally preserved:[56]

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[50] Wright, *New Heavens*, 23.

[51] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Eschatology in Christian Feminist Theologies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 339.

[52] Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 19-20, 205.

[53] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 105-08.

[54] Ibid., xvi-xvii, 107-08.

[55] Moltmann, *In the End*, 103-07.

[56] Ibid., 105-07.

> […] we ascribe immortality not to a substance or some untouchable nucleus within us (such as the Platonic soul) but to the relationship of the whole person to the immortal God.[57]
>
> […] within God's relationship to us our whole life is immortal. As mortal, transitory men and women we remain immortal and non-transitory in the immortal and non-transitory community with God himself.[58]

While the resurrection of the body has been a central tenet of Christian faith since the days of the early church, the particularities of the transformation process have garnered less agreement.[59] As Stephen T. Davis outlines, there have been at least four general theories that attempt to explain the nature of a person's existence between death and resurrection: "*temporary disembodiment*", "*soul sleep*", "*temporary nonexistence*", and "*immediate resurrection*".[60] All four assume eternal existence for the deceased, but they disagree as to when the resurrected body becomes integral to that. A fifth theory, "'spiritual resurrection'", dismisses the physical body from the equation entirely and suggests instead "our persons, our selves, will be resurrected, but not our body."[61] *Temporary disembodiment* assumes an "interim period" during which the soul exists in a disembodied state but is still able to do everything except those things that require a body, which is raised at a future time.[62] *Soul sleep* allows for a similar interval between death and bodily resurrection; however, during this time the soul exists in an "unconscious state".[63] *Temporary nonexistence* is closely linked with "materialism or physicalism" in regard to the nature of persons; at death a person ceases to exist but "will come back into existence" in the general resurrection of the eschaton.[64] And finally, with *immediate resurrection* no interval exists; instead "at the moment of death, God raises the body and reconstitutes the person."[65]

While these four theories uniquely address questions of order and process that, at present, cannot be definitively answered, they assert in common the expectation of bodily resurrection. Thus, it could be argued that in their assertion of this expectation, they presume the body's importance to a person's continuing existence; that is,

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[57] Ibid., 105.
[58] Ibid., 107.
[59] This is not to say that the former does not have it disputants, such as Ruether. See also Robert B. Stewart, ed., *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).
[60] Stephen T. Davis, "Eschatology and Resurrection," in Walls, *Eschatology*, 389-90.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 387.
[63] Ibid., 388.
[64] Ibid., 388.
[65] Ibid.

embodiment is seen as an essential feature of humanness—one that, therefore, must and will be preserved.[66] Yet because naturally occurring biological processes of growth, ageing, and even post-mortem decay also mean that the body never exists (either in life or at death) as a static entity, the preservation of the body presents apparent difficulties. Hence, conceptual as well as experiential awareness of the body's continuously changing physical state has led some to wonder how the resurrection will resolve these materially transient differences: *which* body or person will be raised; or, as some have specifically asked, to which age?[67] Of course, the resurrection, if and when it occurs, will implicitly and immediately answer the foundational question that underlies these concerns: What, specifically, constitutes the person? Until then, however, the issue of personal continuity in the resurrection will continue to be debated. Thus, as Davis shows, a number of "objections" to the "general resurrection" query the maintenance of "personal identity".[68] Essentially, they ask: how do we know if the resurrected person is the same person as the one in pre-mortem existence?[69] What ensures continuity of person? If reassembly of all of a person's previous body matter is required, then resurrection appears problematic: a post-mortem body's "material particles" could occupy a multiplicity of unknown locations or, even more troubling, have become part of another body through cannibalism.[70] (Organ transplants, which now include faces among the options, provide a contemporary parallel for similar issues regarding personal identity and the physical body.)[71] If both persons are resurrected, for whom will the matter in question be used?[72] Is the entirety of the exact same body necessary for the existence of "the person"? Throughout history, various answers have been proposed: The abbé Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier argued that "the 'body'" should be understood not as "the total mass of material particles" but as "the *stamina originalia* of Liebniz and Clarke, the interior

[66] For the "embodied nature […as] essential" to humans, see: Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 148, 439.

[67] McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 129.

[68] Davis, "Eschatology and Resurrection," 391-92.

[69] Ibid., 392.

[70] Ibid., 391-92.

[71] While cannibalism operates on a significantly deeper level of displacement, dramatic changes in a person's appearance can, at least initially, affect our ability to recognize him or her. We then rely upon other factors such as a person's voice or shared knowledge and memories.

[72] Davis, "Eschatology and Resurrection," 391; McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 129.

secret of memory and selfhood";[73] for his part, Augustine offered the priority of first occurrence;[74] additionally, Davis suggests God may have his own criteria by which he determines which original atomic parts are absolutely necessary, thereby leaving open the possibility that "entirely new atoms" could be used for the remainder of the body.[75]

If, however, we do not impose the "original matter" requirement, what will ensure that the person resurrected in the "new body" is the same person as before? Again, what criteria should be applied? Davis identifies three through which continuity of personal identity in the afterlife might be evaluated: the "*memory criterion*", the "*bodily criterion*", or the "'psychological continuity'" criterion.[76] The first assumes that we can be sure a person is the same if they carry the same memories and other "mental characteristics such as personality and dispositions" as before.[77] The second proposes that the person is the same if he or she can be recognized as "hav[ing] the same body", albeit "at two different times".[78] While both criteria are commonly used to determine a person's identity in everyday life, whether or not they are "necessary or sufficient criteri[a]" for ensuring the continuity of personal identity in the afterlife is unclear. Hence, some argue that a person in the afterlife could only be considered a "replica" and, therefore, not the same as the pre-mortem person.[79] Others have abandoned the attempt to find definitive criteria for determining sameness;[80] alternatively, they seek only the pre-mortem person's "'closest continuer'": the person in the afterlife who shares "'psychological continuity'" with the original.[81] Davis points out that the latter proposal will be unsatisfying to some "since resurrection is embedded in a theology that requires that *we*—the very persons who we are—will survive death."[82]

In their own way, each of these proposals seeks to reconcile our experience of material transience in persons with the expectation that these same persons will be preserved beyond death. Unlike Platonism, in which the physical body can be

[73] As cited in McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 129.
[74] As cited in Davis, "Eschatology and Resurrection," 391; McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 129.
[75] Davis, "Eschatology and Resurrection," 391
[76] Ibid., 392-93.
[77] Ibid., 392.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 392-93.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 393.

discarded, Christianity maintains the significance of both matter and the body through its emphasis on resurrection. Of course preservation of either requires transformation of some kind; *these* bodies are mortal and finite and, therefore, could not perdure indefinitely in their present, limited state. Thus, there is a recognition that, in and of itself, *this* body lacks that which would allow it to achieve immortality; instead it is sown with the seeds of death and decay. Without divine transformation, then, this finitude cannot be overcome.[83] Hence, both the necessity and anticipation of a changed bodily existence are reflected in the historic liturgical and aesthetic practices of the church, as well as in its scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:54 states "When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'"[84] For the apostle Paul, Wright explains, this expectation—the corruptible made incorruptible and the perishable, imperishable—sat at the core of his convictions; it reflected the outworking of divine power over death:

> he [Paul] believed, and articulated in considerable detail, that the resurrection would not only be bodily […], but that it would also involve *transformation*. The present body is corruptible, decaying and subject to death; but death, which spits in the face of the good creator God, cannot have the last word. The creator will therefore make a new world, and new bodies, proper to the new age.[85]

Moreover, burial practices have also reflected these beliefs. In the Church of England's 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, "The Order for the Burial of the Dead" instructs the officiant to speak these words:[86]

> FORASMUCH as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear *brother* here departed: we therefore commit *his* body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.[87]

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[83] Whether immortality is possible (without divine assistance) is the question of the age. Its cultural prominence prompted molecular biologist Mark Benecke to examine some of the contemporary claims. Mark Benecke, *The Dream of Eternal Life: Biomedicine, Aging, and Immortality*, trans. Rachel Rubenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[84] 1 Cor. 15:54 (NRSV)

[85] Wright, *Resurrection*, 372.

[86] Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*, book of 1662 with additions and derivations approved in 1927 (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 289.

[87] Ibid.

In addition, Seasoltz identifies the early church's usage of particular non-Christian imagery—"the dolphin, the phoenix, and the peacock"—as a means of representing "the transformation or incorruptibility of the flesh" that was anticipated in the resurrection. As a result of their symbolic import, these images appeared on tombs, catacombs, sarcophagi, and then, eventually, in churches.[88]

Yet this remarkable transformation is not limited to the resurrection of persons; the hope for the perishable made imperishable is anticipated not only for humanity but the entire cosmos as well. Polkinghorne concludes: "we must expect that there will be a destiny for the whole universe beyond its death, just as there will be a post mortem destiny for humankind."[89] Others, such as theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg include within their interpretation of Romans 8 the extension of divine action to include all of creation:

> […] creation's waiting for the manifestation of the children of God (v.19) suggests that its own corruptibility will be vanquished by the power of the life-creating Spirit as the world is transformed into the new creation of a new heaven and a new earth, just as the first creation already was created by the power of the Spirit (Gen. 1:2).[90]

Moltmann describes this transformative destiny as the "rebirth of the cosmos to its enduring form."[91] These predictions suggest that matter as we presently experience it will be in some way changed, whereby it will no longer be subject to the previous futility of transience and decay.

What we see, therefore, in these and other afterlife discussions is the recurring motif of determining that which will and must be preserved in order to achieve meaningful continuity with current human existence. Indeed, the topic of continuity versus discontinuity forms a prominent part of the conversation in eschatological and related inquiries.[92] For instance, Miraslov Volf discusses these to establish the "ultimate significance of human work", asking whether there is a lasting or "inherent value" in something which is "occup[ied] with transitory things and relations".[93] Others find aesthetic metaphors useful for understanding the complex relationship

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[88] Seasoltz, *Sense of the Sacred*, 112.

[89] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 113.

[90] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 551.

[91] Moltmann, *In the End*, 151.

[92] This concerns whether the world will be remade or renewed: whether there is definitive break between the two worlds through the destruction of the first.

[93] Volf, *Theology of Work*. See esp. chap. 4.

between eternity and the irreversible temporality and transience of our present experience. Drawing eschatological insights from the paintings of Monet, Richard Bauckham suggests eternity might be imagined, not as the retention of that which is constant and "unchanging", but as "the preservation of the transient, the recovery of every moment of value from the past in which it had perished with time."[94] Similarly, it is the apparent "preservation of the transient" which forms the basis of Keats's meditation on immortality in "Ode on a Grecian Urn", in which the unchanging pastoral scene starkly contrasts with his normative experience of impermanence:

> O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
> Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
> With forest branches and trodden weed;
> Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of thought
> As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
> When old age shall this generation waste,
> Thou shalt remain […].[95]

Hence, there is recognition that some aspects of eternity likely will be discontinuous with present temporal experience, although conceptually these are perhaps more difficult to grasp. Broadly, Moltmann characterizes the whole of the eschatological transformation as a transition from transience to permanence: the aim and thus the hope of which is "the new creation of all things into their *enduring* form."[96] Yet what exactly is the nature of this enduring form? The challenge, Moltmann concludes, is to imagine this new existence in terms of "change without transience, time without past, and life without death"—a task made all the more difficult by its marked contrast to all of our previous experience of life.[97]

Although eternity has historically been an important subject within the life and teachings of the church, there are those within contemporary Christianity for whom the afterlife—especially as it has been traditionally understood—has ceased to be a central concern. Indeed, Davies notes both its de-emphasis and dismissal from some Christian perspectives.[98] Kellehear also observes its displacement: "Some prominent theologians, such as Hans Kung, even discourage thoughts of the afterlife because, he

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[94] Bauckham, "Time, Eternity and the Arts," 30. See also: Richard Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," in *God Will be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 226.

[95] Keats, *Poetry and Prose*, 461-62.

[96] Moltmann, *In the End*, x. Emphasis mine.

[97] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1979), 126.

[98] Davies, *Brief History of Death*, 38-39.

argues, they unnecessarily 'distract' from the broader and, as he sees it, more important task of deepening one's 'faith' […]."[99] David Ray Griffin calls attention to Schubert Ogden's expressed indifference: "Whether or not we somehow manage to survive death for a longer or shorter period of time, I regard as a question of no particular theological interest."[100] Others, while far from denying the hope of eternity, encourage a renewed concern for this life and the environment in order to correct a common but—they argue—unnecessary devaluation, which results from a particular understanding of the world's destiny as destruction.[101] (2 Peter 3:7,10-13 often serves as the primary interpretive lens through which this latter conclusion is reached.) At the heart of this issue, in particular, is an assumed relationship between transience and value. Regardless whether belief in an afterlife is retained, continuity of existence or immortality of some kind remains an important concern for most, although the form it takes changes accordingly.

III. Death *is* the End: Immortality without the Afterlife

Of course, not all cultures have anticipated an ongoing post-mortem existence or afterlife that was either personal or desirable. Many scholars have drawn attention to

[99] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 198-99.

[100] As quoted in David Ray Griffin, "Process Eschatology," in Walls, *Eschatology*, 298.

[101] Both Moo and Wright address these issues to varying degrees: the former focuses on the theological basis for an "environmental ethic"; the latter seeks to correct what he argues is the mistaken notion of "heaven" as the Christian's final destination. However, both root their exhortations in the expectation of an afterlife, albeit one that involves a renewed habitation: a new heavens and a new earth, which will exhibit a degree of continuity with the present ones. Moo argues: "One hears far too often an unconcern for this world justified by the slogan, 'it is all going to burn anyway': since only the human soul will survive the fires of judgment, only the human soul is really worth bothering about. But even if one holds the view that this world is destined for nothing but destruction, the biblical mandate for Christians to be involved in meeting the needs of the world in which we now live is clear and uncompromising. I may believe that the body I now have is destined for radical transformation; but I am not for that reason unconcerned about what I eat or how much I exercise. On the other hand, it must be said that the conviction that this world is destined for renewal rather than destruction, as I have argued in this paper, does provide a more substantial basis for a Christian environmental ethic." Moo, "New Creation," 484. See also: Wright, *New Heavens*, 4, 9. Even contemporary artist Makoto Fujimura finds it necessary to address this issue in relation to creative endeavors: "'I've heard many Christians say, 'Why should we care about art and culture when we know that all will be burned up in the coming judgment? Aren't our souls the only thing that is eternal? […].' Yes, […] but […] While God does have the power to destroy all that is wicked and sinful, he often chooses to sanctify (as in gold) rather than burn away (as in dross), transforming our works. As the Bible makes it clear that God's desire is that the children of God be sanctified, surprisingly, God will also sanctify our works, so that our works may last beyond Christ's Judgment Day […]. The Bible is filled with this promise of an enduring culture of God. If we are saved for both the new heaven *and* the new earth, then we had better begin 'storing up treasures' by bringing eternal grace into our ordinary, earthly lives. This is what Fra Angelico's works attest to, and when we enter into his world, we, too, are filled with hope of things to come." Makoto Fuijimura, *Refractions: A Journey of Art, Faith, and Culture* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 145.

the "this-worldly" conclusions of the Gilgamesh epic, where any hopes for immortality are decisively dashed.[102] David Bentley Hart notes the absence of expectation for "either afterlife or resurrection until very late in [the Hebrew Bible];" instead what "awaits […] is Sheol, a sort of abyss in which impalpable shadows of ourselves linger on amidst the dark and darkness. To die is to be cut off from the land of the living—and so to be cut off from God—permanently".[103] Any sense of continuity lay in the divine covenant-promise of both succeeding generations and a permanent presence in the land;[104] Davies describes these as foundational to "the sense of destiny and immortality" which characterized Israel's history.[105] Bailey identifies the survival of "the group", rather than the individual, as the preeminent hope and promise that shaped Israel's response to death.[106] In addition, this was influenced by the expectation that the name or reputation of the righteous—even in the absence of progeny—would be preserved and remembered.[107]

While Platonists assumed the immortal nature of the soul, Epicureans denied it and rejected any afterlife existence altogether.[108] Instead, the finality of death was embraced—a point of view put to apt use on grave markers: "*non fui, fui, non sum, non curo* (I was not, I was, I am not, I don't care [or: suffer])".[109] The words echo in some contemporary views. Similarly, for most Eastern religions "life after death" is neither the aim nor the hope of human existence. According to Jan Nattier, Buddhism (which shares similarities with Hinduism and Jainism) considers the question "does a person continue to exist after death, or not?" irrelevant and unhelpful to the goal of achieving nirvana, which results in a person's "final death."[110] In contrast to linear existence—moving from a beginning to an end—the Buddhist "universe (as well as […] the individual)" is characterized by a continuous "cycle of birth and death".[111]

Moreover, whereas the Christian vision of death and eternity once held a position of cultural dominance in the West, it no longer does. Confidence in the

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[102] Davies, *Brief History of Death*, 21-23. Also: Ruether, "Feminist Theologies," 329; David Bentley Hart, "Death, Final Judgment, and the Meaning of Life," in Walls, *Eschatology*, 479-80.
[103] Hart, "Meaning of Life," 479. Also: Davies, *Brief History of Death*, 6.
[104] Davies, *Brief History of Death*, 5.
[105] Ibid. Also: Wright, *Resurrection*, 99.
[106] Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 58.
[107] Ibid., 59.
[108] Segal, *Life after Death*, 223.
[109] Ibid. Also: Wright, *Resurrection*, 34.
[110] Jan Nattier, "Buddhist Eschatology," in Walls, *Eschatology,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 151, 161.
[111] Ibid., 151.

existence of an afterlife, God, or immortality—as they have been traditionally understood—has been significantly eroded in contemporary thought. Griffin argues that "rejection of supernaturalism" is the primary reason the post-mortem continuation of life seems untenable to those who hold materialist or epiphenomenonalist views of the mind: whether it [the mind] is synonymous with or contingent on the brain matters little; without a living physical body the mind cannot exist at all.[112] Bodily resurrection would provide a solution to this problem, however, it would "requir[e] the agency of a being with omnipotence in the traditional sense" and such a being has already been denied.[113] Even for those who retain belief in life after death, Kellehear argues, their numbers and conceptions of the afterlife are generally greatly diminished.[114] For others, however, death has come to be regarded as nothing more than the termination of consciousness.[115] Accordingly, the perceived "finality" of death has undergone considerable change, as has the conception of immortality.

This shift, of course, did not happen overnight. Bailey suggests that when the "scientific revolution" dislodged humanity from its privileged position in the cosmos, the presumption of immortality was also called into question.[116] Indeed, during the Enlightenment, as materialism gained ground under the influence of science, belief in an immaterial, immortal soul came under greater scrutiny.[117] John McManners describes the age as one in which increased knowledge of the body's intricate mechanisms seemed poised to reveal the "ultimate" nature of "the relationship between mind and matter";[118] it was perceived that the former "had become sufficiently complex, to be almost, a substitute for the soul."[119] Thus, the soul, which had hitherto been the bedrock for previous discussions of immortality and the

[112] Griffin, "Process Eschatology," 300. However, there are others who imagine non-corporeal means of retention. In the film *Transcendence* protagonist Will Caster's mind is uploaded to a computer. Sylvie Magerstädt, *Body, Soul and Cyberspace in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doifinder/10.1057/9781137399410.0001, [49].

[113] Griffin, "Process Eschatology," 300.

[114] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 198.

[115] For instance, philosophers Samuel Scheffler and David Rönnegard both express this view. Scheffler, Samuel. *Death and the Afterlife*. Edited by Niko Kolodny. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199982509.001.0001 [2]; David Rönnegard, "Atheist in a Foxhole," *Philosophy Now*, no. 105 (2014), https://philosophynow.org/issues/105/Atheist_In_A_Foxhole [n.p.].

[116] Bailey, Sr., *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 3.

[117] Pattison, "Death," 194. Also: McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 148-64.

[118] McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 164.

[119] Ibid.

afterlife, became the object of increased anti-religious attack.[120] McManners summarizes an early eighteenth-century French manuscript (circa 1720s or 1730s) of opponents' arguments:

> there is no tangible evidence for the existence of the soul and no explanation of how it can affect or be affected by the body; the myth of its immortality arises merely from our wishful thinking; men are closely related to the animals, and the malfunctioning of the body in illness, intoxication, and old age manifestly affects the mind and personality; what we call the soul is, in effect, a sort of fire circulating in the blood, and is destined to extinction when the body dies.[121]

With the rejection of the soul, the physical body was left as sole provider of personal perdurance; this was a problematic outcome since the body's finitude was, of course, readily apparent.

John Gray suggests it was also Darwinism's new understanding of humanity that inadvertently challenged belief in the afterlife in the nineteenth century.[122] Gray draws out the implications of the new perspective: If "humans are animals, with no special destiny assuring them a future beyond their earthly home" then just like the rest of the animal kingdom, they would experience the "final oblivion" of death and "eventual extinction" as a species.[123] "For nearly everyone", Gray argues, this proved "an intolerable vision".[124] Indeed, it was a bleak future that not even Darwin fully embraced.[125] Hence, for those that had already rejected religion, science had to be levied against science in order to "escape from the world that science had revealed."[126] Gray delineates two prominent attempts: in Britain, the Society for Psychical Research was formed, whose members were intent on finding proof that "human personality survived bodily death";[127] in Russia, the "God-builders" focused their attention on this life, seeking to recreate humanity by any means necessary.[128] It

[120] See Ibid, 160.
[121] Ibid., 160-61.
[122] John Gray, *The Immortalization Commission: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 1, 21. This was not Darwin's intention, of course, since he himself believed in God.
[123] Ibid., 1, 3.
[124] Ibid., 1.
[125] Ibid., 1, 24-25.
[126] Ibid., 1.
[127] Ibid., 1-2.
[128] Ibid., 3, 5; see also145-51.

was their belief that "once the power of science was fully harnessed, death could be overcome by force."[129]

By the twentieth century, Kellehear argues, the assumption "that there are no worlds beyond this one" became the dominant view in the academy, particularly in the field of psychoanalysis; biological death was perceived as a definitive terminus.[130] This premise clearly guides Zygmunt Bauman's 1992 analysis of modern and postmodern culture's relationship with mortality; death is described as "the final void", a "non-existence", or "absolute *nothing*"; "death is the cessation of the very 'acting subject', and with it, *the end* of all perception."[131] In his 1916 essay discussing the effects of the First World War on perceptions of death ("Our Attitudes Towards Death"), Sigmund Freud argued from similar presuppositions whereby he assumed the assertion of any materially transcendent existence to be purely human invention. To Freud, such wishful thinking was an "early" manifestation of the "denial of death":[132]

> Man could no longer keep death at a distance, for he had tasted in it his pain about the dead; but he was nevertheless unwilling to acknowledge it, for he could not conceive of himself as dead. So he devised a compromise: he conceded the fact of his own death as well, but denied it the significance of annihilation—[…]. It was beside the dead body of someone he loved that he invented spirits […]. The [physical] changes brought about by death suggested to him the division of the individual into a body and a soul— […] His persisting memory of the dead became the basis for assuming other forms of existence and gave him the conception of a life continuing after apparent death.
>
> What came into existence beside the dead body of a loved one was not only the doctrine of the soul, the belief in immortality […].[133]

Nearly a century later, atheist humanist philosopher David Rönnegard would echo similar conclusions, summarily rejecting the afterlife as mere fiction; when faced with

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[129] Ibid, 5.

[130] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 54-55. Kellehear highlights both Bauman and Freud's "annihilating" views. Ibid. 55-60.

[131] Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1992), 2.

[132] Sigmund Freud, "Our Attitude toward Death," in vol. 14, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 295.

[133] Ibid., 294-95.

terminal cancer at the age of 37, he refused to regard his own death as anything other than "the end of [his] conscious existence":[134]

> […] religion has never appeared to me as either credible or a source of comfort.
>
> The human desire for religion is partly founded on our fear of death and its consolation through faith in a hereafter.
>
> However, the comforting notion of an afterlife is astonishingly unlikely to be true, and it is not needed.[135]

In the absence of belief in any kind of afterlife, life—for the individual—simply moves toward eventual dissolution. While not all in contemporary Western society have embraced this view, its widespread cultural influence is evident as reliance upon alternative immortalities becomes more prevalent.[136] Some try to circumvent the inevitability of this bleak outcome by seeking endless life-extension through various means; others, like Rosi Braidotti who argues for a posthumanist, vitalist, and materialist approach to existence, simply reframe life and death entirely.[137] As she astutely observes, "One's view on death depends on one's assumptions about Life."[138] With its radical de-placement of "'Man'" from his former position as the "measure of all things", Braidotti's posthumanism rejects anthropocentrism and "expand[s…] the notion of Life towards the non-human or *zoe*."[139] Life is "cosmic energy", "impersonal", and "absolute vitality": the zoe in which the mortal human partakes, but cannot fully contain.[140] We "inhabit" but do not *possess* Life.[141] Hence, death brings alteration without finality since life itself is ongoing and unending.[142] Braidotti regards death, therefore, not as "destination" but as the "constitutive event that is behind us"; the apprehension of which leads to a life oriented toward "radical immanence" not "transcendence".[143] She writes:

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[134] Rönnegard, "Atheist in a Foxhole," n.p.
[135] Ibid.
[136] For instance, although he acknowledges that there are some who believe otherwise, Scheffler uses the belief that there is no actual personal afterlife as the starting point of his philosophical argument because he thinks there is a large enough contingency that will agree with his presuppositions. See Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 18.
[137] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (2013; repr., Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015), 15, 131.
[138] Ibid., 131.
[139] Ibid., 50, 56-57, 60.
[140] Ibid., 131.
[141] Ibid., 133.
[142] Ibid., 131.
[143] Ibid., 132-33.

> Because humans are mortal, death, or the transience of life, is written at our core: it is the event that structures our time-lines and frames our time-zones, not as a limit, but as a porous threshold.[144]

Braidotti, like Ruether, subsumes the individual's existence into a larger collective, which in its own way provides a measure of continuation, albeit without personal consciousness. As we shall also see, Rönnegard and others with similar views are not content to let death have the final word but seek some form of alternative continuity that can give their finite lives meaning.

III. a. The Emergence of Immortality Substitutes

It becomes clear from such historical developments that these transmutations of confidence and new understandings of death do not necessarily do away with the *desire* for continuity and immortality, even when a personal form of such is no longer perceived as a rationally viable option.[145] On the contrary, transcendence of finitude or "permanence" is often pursued through other means, some of which are not altogether new. Even during the classical period, "substitutes" for the soul's immortality, although perhaps inferior, were acknowledged. As Wright observes, in light of the finality of death some concluded "The only real immortality […] was fame."[146] In the Enlightenment's new materialist cosmology, humanity was recompensed for its lost immortality with "a place […] in a grandiose and universal harmony."[147] Yet as McManners remarks, when compared to continuing individual existence this could hardly seem a superior or even equal offering.[148] Diderot, however, proposed an immortality that at least retained lasting individual distinctions: "the survival of the memory of our deeds in the minds of future generations."[149] While a person's self-conscious individuality would still come to an end, his or her name and contribution would continue to be remembered; the future would judge its significance and value.[150] To Diderot this was a substantive alternative; he could easily imagine that even after "'[…] a hundred million years'" Voltaire's name and

[144] Ibid., 131.
[145] Or, some might even say innately or ethically viable. See Braidotti's reframing of life and death: Braidotti, *Posthuman*, 131-137.
[146] Wright, *Resurrection*, 34.
[147] McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment, 165*.
[148] Ibid., 167.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

works would still be remembered and read.[151] Here was a glory and significance that did not depend on the existence of an afterlife to inspire virtuous activity.[152] Yet some of Diderot's contemporaries questioned his confidence in the efficacy of his vision. Falconet doubted the security and judgment of "the process of transmission", while others suggested that such immortality was precarious if it depended upon material continuation: books decay and the earth itself had no guaranteed enduring existence.[153]

Nonetheless, deliberate efforts to secure individual remembrance through material form are no anomaly in human history. In earlier centuries, affluent Romans used wills as a means to "ensure personal immortality through the creation of memorable tombs, funerals, or other public buildings."[154] Furthermore, Ariès argues that, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, plaques, tombs, and wills were also a means by which those in the West sought to extend individual remembrance.[155] These practices did not necessarily preclude belief in an immortal soul; and wills, in particular, could be used to ensure that the spiritual state of the dead was not neglected by being forgotten: from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, wills were indeed used to "provide […] for perpetual religious services for the salvation of their soul."[156] Regardless of its functional particularities, memorialization served to keep the deceased individual "alive" in the minds of the living. Ariès suggests the increase in the number of inscribed tombs in the eighteenth century demonstrated a desire by the artisan middle class to "leave anonymity behind and preserve […] identity after death."[157] Drawing upon the work of Ariès and others, Tony Walter describes the early effects of secularization as shifting focus from the soul's eternal destiny to immortality through earthly legacy:

> In the high Middle Ages people were concerned with what would happen to their souls, but in the Renaissance the concern was more what would happen after death to their reputation on earth. The Renaissance man hoped that the

[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., 168.
[153] Ibid., 169.
[154] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 155.
[155] Philipe Ariès, *Western Attitudes to Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 49.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

> art, architecture and literature produced or patronised by him would survive and so guarantee immortality.[158]

Today, buildings and even financial scholarships are routinely named after their benefactors or often, in the case of the latter, to honor the memory of deceased persons.

Although his conclusion is not without its critics, Bauman proposes that all cultural activity is in fact an act of conscious resistance to death;[159] mortality gives birth to the pursuit of immortality, which is manifest through humanity's attempts to make its cultural mark on existence:

> It is because we know that we must *die* that we are so busy *making* life. It is because we are aware of mortality that we preserve the past and create the future. Mortality is ours without asking – but *im*mortality is something we must build ourselves. Immortality is not a mere absence of death; it is *defiance* and denial of death. It is "meaningful" only because there is death, that implacable reality which is to be defied. There would be no immortality without mortality. Without mortality, no history, no culture – no humanity. Mortality "created" the opportunity: all the rest has been created by beings aware that they are mortal.[160]

Of course, because Bauman's presumptive framework of death eliminates all forms of actual immortality, cultural activities are only allowed to serve this function.[161] Thus, opposition defines them. In contrast, Braidotti removes any sense of antagonism toward death.[162] Whereas Bauman posits a reaction of protest, Braidotti suggests an opposite desire: "What we humans truly yearn for is to disappear by merging into this generative flow of becoming, the precondition for which is loss, disappearance and disruption of the atomized, individual self."[163] That which results from this "becoming-imperceptible" of the individual is not "transcendence" of personal finitude "but radical empirical immanence, that is to say a reversal of all that lives into the roar of the 'chaosmic' echoing chamber of becoming."[164] Thus, that which

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[158] Tony Walter, *The Revival of Death* (1994; repr., London: Routledge, 2002) 14-15.

[159] Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality*, 31.
However, his conclusion is not without its critics; see Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 58-61.

[160] Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality*, 8.

[161] In contrast, some who assume a personal afterlife take a more positive view of culture and speak of cultural activities as a human calling with lasting impact: one that does not originate in death-denial. See David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture*, rev. ed. (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2004); Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*; Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grover, IL: IVP Books, 2008); Wright, *Surprised by Hope*.

[162] That is, "making friends with impersonal death." Braidotti, *Posthuman*, 137.

[163] Ibid., 136.

[164] Ibid.

endures is not the individual being but Life, or "the generative force of *zoe*: "the great animal-machine of the universe."[165]

From the very fact that these alternative forms of immortality exist we might infer that the desire for continuity and persistence of some kind is deeply ingrained in humanity. Indeed, Lifton argues, "death and the continuity of life is actually humanity's oldest and most fundamental paradigm."[166] We have already seen how anticipation of life beyond death has been a historically enduring belief. Yet even when it is absent or rejected, these examples illustrate the expectation, or perhaps need, that *something* endures, even if it is not "me". So when individually conscious continuing existence is rejected from possibility, the desire for immortality or perdurance manifests itself in other ways. This occurs, according to Lifton's theory, because immortality is the key psychological framework through which people "maintain an inner sense of continuous symbolic relationship, over time and space, with the various elements of life" in the face of death and finitude.[167] Indeed, he agrees with Otto Rank's emphasis on "humanity's perpetual need for 'an assurance of eternal survival for his self'".[168] While belief in the existence of a personal afterlife is one means by which people express this continuity and connection, they also do so in other ways. Lifton's delineation of these is particularly helpful because it expands the range of categories with which we can identify and interpret humanity's varied responses to mortality.

III. b. Robert J. Lifton's "Theory of Symbolic Immortality"

In his "theory of symbolic immortality", Lifton proposes five modes through which people manifest a "sense of immortality".[169]

1) "Biological" or "biosocial"

2) "Theological"

3) "'Works'"

4) "Eternal nature"

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[165] Ibid., 136-37. Although hers is a decidedly secular approach (see p. 136) it displays a number of similarities to core concepts in Buddhism.

[166] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 276 .

[167] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 277.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid., 278-79.

5) "Experiential transcendence"[170]

In the first mode ("biological" or "biosocial") immortality is experienced through a perceived "endless chain […] of attachments".[171] These might include a person's descendents or larger collective entities such as a "tribe", "nation", or humanity as a whole: all those through whom someone expects to "liv[e] on".[172] The second ("theological") mode may include belief in the existence of a "literal […] afterlife" but it is not necessary.[173] More generally, a person expects to "transcend[…] death through spiritual attainment" of some kind.[174] Thus, both Christian and Buddhist frameworks of transcendence are equally illustrative of this mode. Thirdly, "'works'" assumes a person's actions and activities will "live […] on beyond" his or her lifespan.[175] Immortality takes the form of "enduring human impact" of "one's contribution", regardless if it is small or great.[176] Diderot's Enlightenment proposal and Steiner's depiction of artistic creation as a "wager against mortality" aptly demonstrate this mode.[177] In the fourth mode ("eternal nature") the endurance of nature provides the needed sense of continuity.[178] Finally, in "experiential transcendence" there is the experience of "a state so intense that in it time and death disappear."[179] Lifton borrows Mirceau Eliade's term "'continuous present'" to describe the sensation in which past, present, and future are perceived as one.[180]

In delineating these modes, Lifton appears unconcerned whether *personal* immortality is possible, although he seems to suggest it is not.[181] Indeed, he does not assess any mode's efficacy to achieve its proposed immortality. However, as he acknowledges, a person or culture's belief in their viability is critical.[182] Instead,

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[170] Ibid. I have altered the original capitalization for this list.
[171] Ibid., 278.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.
[177] George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes toward the Redefinition of Culture*, 1974 ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 71.
[178] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 279. Lifton cites Japan as an example. For the natural or green burial trend in the West see Davies, *Theology of Death,* 119-120; Douglas Davies and Hannah Rumble, *Natural Burial: Traditional-Secular Spiritualities and Funeral Innovation* (London: Continuum, 2012).
[179] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 279.
[180] Ibid.
[181] He seems to praise this aspect of Freud's approach to death and immortality: "Freud's attitude has the merit of unflinching acceptance of death as a total annihilation of the organism." Ibid., 277.
[182] Ibid., 279-80.

Lifton is concerned with the way in which these modes *symbolically* provide people with a perception of continuity between themselves and "history, past and future."[183] His observations have led him to conclude that these modes are expressed both individually and culturally, with the latter occurring when a particular expression of immortality becomes the dominant individual form. Additionally, as Lifton shows, the cultural changes experienced by individuals or societies as a whole in response to current events are made visible in the concomitant shift in dominance from one mode to another.[184] In other words, significant cultural shifts are equally reflected by the modes of immortality that are most commonly manifested in that culture. For instance, Lifton suggests that the shift from a "theological" to "natural and biological" mode of immortality in the nineteenth century was indicative of the cultural impact of Darwin's influential discoveries.[185] Similarly, in the early 1970s when the political and ecological situation made the world seem vulnerable to annihilation, "experiential transcendence" became the only mode in which many in the West could still believe.[186] As others note, we also see cultural shifts such as these expressed in changing funereal or burial practices.[187] More importantly, for our broader discussion of mortality and immortality, Lifton's theory provides a way to interpret and understand reactions to finitude and transience, including those that involve the aesthetic realm.

III. c. Meaning without an Afterlife: David Rönnegard's Immortality

As we have already seen, a thing's transience readily provokes an assessment of its value; of course a transient human life is no exception. Moreover, lack of belief in an afterlife does not eliminate the need to make sense of death and determine life's meaning and value. On the contrary, acceptance of life's irrevocable finitude may perhaps increase its perceived necessity. This is the situation in which Rönnegard found himself after being diagnosed with a terminal illness. Like many others in the twenty-first century, Rönnegard is convinced of the unalterable finality of death. With his own imminent demise in view, Rönnegard rejected outright what he regarded as

[183] Ibid., 277.
[184] Ibid., 279.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid., 279-80.
[187] See Ariès, *Attitudes to Death*, 49-40, 69-72; Davies, *Theology of Death*, 117-19; Davies and Rumble, *Natural Burial*.

religion's "false consolation" yet acknowledged the need for something to take its place: "[…] consolation is sorely needed."[188] Thus, he was compelled to ask "What provides meaning for a life lived, and acceptance of a fate anticipated?"[189] In spite of the subject matter's obvious relevance to others with similar viewpoints, he found it was largely absent from discussions of contemporary secular philosophers—at least in any helpful way.[190] He therefore considered the issue through his unique experiential lens, exploring the relationship between transience and value by asking: When a finite life is considered retrospectively, what retains its value? What are those "enduring sentiments" that give "the sensation of a life fully lived?"[191]

What Rönnegard clearly desired was a *sense of completeness* for a life cut short—a completion, Moltmann argued, which requires something beyond death to achieve it.[192] Even though Rönnegard disregards the possibility of life after death, his conclusions still reflect a desire for immortality—albeit a surrogate one:

> When such sentiments [—the "memories we hold dear" or things that "spring from events that touched the lives of others"—] are shared they live on in those who stay behind. And so the Humanist quest for immortality is not corporeal. Rather it takes many forms that touch lives, such as the friendships we maintain, the children we give birth to, the enterprises we start, and the books we write; in essence the footprints we leave behind.[193]

In Lifton's terms, Rönnegard attempts to make finitude meaningful though "biological" or "works" modes of immortality; that is, he seeks an ongoing connection between his life and the future through his contribution to the lives of others. Indeed, philosopher Samuel Scheffler argues it is "our participation in valued relationships with people we hope will outlive us" that "transforms our attitudes toward the future after we are gone."[194] Hence, it matters to us what happens after we

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[188] Rönnegard, "Atheist in a Foxhole," n.p.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] This is a similar query to the one Moltmann makes, although his solution incorporates an eternal realm. "Every lived moment has an eternal significance and already constitutes a fulfilled life. For fulfilled life is not measured by the number of years that have been lived through, or spent in one way or another. It is measured according to the depth of lived experience. Even a child who dies young has had a fulfilled life"; "I believe that God will also complete the life which he has begun with a human being (Phil. 1.6). If God is God, even violent death cannot prevent him from doing so. So I believe that God's history with our lives will continue after our deaths, until the completion is reached in which a soul will find its wrongs redressed, and will find rest and happiness." Moltmann, *In the End*, 7, 116-117.
[193] Rönnegard, "Atheist in a Foxhole," n.p.
[194] Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 31.

die, in spite of the fact that we assumedly will not be aware of it.[195] Accordingly, we need to "personalize our relation to the future";[196] the importance we attach to being remembered after death is but one manifestation of this.[197]

Thus, "footprints" is a predictable metaphor choice for what Rönnegard describes; it is a commonly used image for communicating the idea of legacy or the influential traces of a person's life. Longfellow uses it in this way in "A Psalm of Life":

> Lives of great men all remind
> We can make our lives sublime,
> And, departing, leave behind us
> Footprints on the sands of time […][198]

However, the metaphor's aptness for Rönnegard's conclusions is perhaps far greater than he may have realized or intended: for, unlike Moltmann, he roots the meaning and value of a transient life in equally transient things—things whose expected endurance is far from guaranteed. Indeed, this insecurity, demonstrated by the transitory results of human labor and the fleetingness of memory, is what particularly troubled Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes. Daniel C. Fredericks summarizes Qoheleth's conclusions:

> In [Eccles.] 9.5 […], we see another reason why the value of the deceased's labors are so restricted: "they have no more reward, for their memory is forgotten". Any reward one might hope for in being remembered by all generations is a pipe dream. Qoheleth wrestles with this, considering it to be no incidental annoyance, but a travesty worth highlighting frequently.[199]

Rönnegard clearly depends on the *continuity* of the things he values to give his shortened life its sense of fulfillment. "[F]riendships", "children", "enterprises", and "books" are the footprints—the traces of existence—he both expects and needs to remain; it is the knowledge that these will perdure that provides consolation.[200] Yet, as Qoheleth's astute observations remind us, what we assume will endure may in reality be far more ephemeral. Analogously, footprints, with rare exception, are only

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[195] Ibid., 80-81.
[196] Ibid., 30.
[197] Ibid., 30.
[198] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Poems and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2000) 3-4.
[199] Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 54.
[200] We need not assume that Rönnegard expects them to endure forever. However, the knowledge that they would not persist at all, even for a reasonable length of time after his death, would likely cause distress. This assumption is the basis of Scheffler's argument concerning the "collective afterlife", which I explore in the next section.

ever temporary: in time, the rain, the tide, or mop will wash them away.[201] In the end, they are no more permanent or lasting than the person who made them. Hence, although through these footprints he imagines and anticipates the extension of his life after death, Rönnegard's chosen metaphor also underscores the persistent encroachment of transience and finitude.

III. d. Samuel Scheffler's "Collective Afterlife"

In his "theory of symbolic immortality" Lifton identifies "humanity" as one of the collective entities that provide the individual with assurance of continuity beyond her own death.[202] That is, the anticipation of individual loss through death is ameliorated by the expected survival of the group to which one belongs. Lifton points to those cultures that place "extraordinary emphasis on the family line" as prime examples of this type of thinking.[203] Certainly, appeals to individual sacrifice during a time of war function along this principle. We might also look to Israel's reliance upon the divine promise of the nation's endurance as yet another instance. However, these are not the only occurrences. With remarkable insight into humanity's foundational assumptions, Scheffler argues that our presumptive belief in the "collective afterlife"—that is, the expectation that humanity will continue to exist after I die—is the unconscious driving force behind much of what we do;[204] take this away and most of what we presently devote our energies to would simply lose all meaning and purpose.[205] If after my own death no one will be left in existence, then who will benefit from my life's labors: scientific, creative, or altruistic?[206] Furthermore, he argues, this is a widespread, albeit unconscious, motivation for our actions.

To arrive at these and other conclusions, Scheffler runs a series of thought experiments in which he imagines the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of a "doomsday scenario", whereby an individual learns that soon after her death the rest of humanity will also cease to exist.[207] Her and others' reactions in these experiments are, in part, dependent upon a shared presupposition, which as Scheffler

[201] Footprints in wet concrete might be one exception.
[202] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 278-79.
[203] Ibid., 278.
[204] Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, abstract, 15.
[205] Ibid., 23-24, 26, 37, 51.
[206] Ibid., 23-26.
[207] Ibid., 18-50.

acknowledges, is a viewpoint similar to his own: "biological death represents the final and irrevocable end of an individual's life."[208] Accordingly, he uses "afterlife" to refer to the ongoing existence of humanity, not the eternal destiny of individuals.[209] Following on from this, Scheffler proposes that, without our undergirding belief in the continuity of the human species, mortality would simply overwhelm us:

> And my claim is that, despite the dread and terror with which many people face the prospect of their own deaths, there is one extremely important respect in which many face that prospect with greater equanimity than they would exhibit if faced with the imminent disappearance of humanity itself. Things continue to matter to them even though they know they will die, and the prospect of their deaths does not exert the same depressive effect on their ability to live value-laden lives as would the prospective disappearance of humanity itself.[210]

Therefore, our ability to live meaningful lives depends upon the security of the collective afterlife: "our conviction that things matter is sustained by our confidence that life will go on after we ourselves are gone."[211] Moreover, the annihilation of humanity would render all our efforts to gain dominion over temporality a failure.[212]

In addition, Scheffler argues that anticipating a "personalize[d] relation[ship with] the future" softens the emotional impact of our forthcoming non-existence.[213] We find comfort in the fact that our death will cause "disrupt[ion]" in the relational network to which we belong because it allows us to "retain[…]" some form of "social identity in the world of the future" even if we are not around to enjoy it.[214] In other words, it enables us to imagine our participation in the world of the future even it will not be one we can consciously experience.[215] This provides the sense of "continuity" which Lifton likewise argues is psychologically essential.[216] The expectation that others will remember us thus provides a measure of consolation, even if we must logically acknowledge that such remembrance cannot last forever.[217] Not only do small relational circles enable our personalization of the future, so do the larger affinity groups (such as a nation) of which we are a part. In particular, the latter

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[208] Ibid., 2-3.
[209] Ibid., 15.
[210] Ibid., 77.
[211] Ibid., 80-81 Or, for others, the existence of a personal afterlife: ibid., 73-74.
[212] Ibid., 81.
[213] Ibid., 29-30, 32, 35, 37.
[214] Ibid., 29, 34.
[215] Ibid., 29-30.
[216] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 275-77.
[217] Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 29-30.

maintains the continuity of values to which we ascribed during our lifetime through its transmission of shared traditions. As Scheffler explains, "traditions" extend the "deep human impulse to preserve what is valued" "beyond the life span of any single individual or generation."[218] Participation in collective traditions allows my individual values to persist through time, even after my death. Thus, Scheffler argues:

> [I]n relying on a tradition to help preserve our values, we are seeking to create a future whose inhabitants will share with us some of the commitments that matter most to us. […] Conversely, in seeking to ensure the survival of communal or national groups that matter to us, we are seeking to create a future in which the values we have historically shared with other members of the group will continue to endure. […] Ultimately, both solutions are part of a unified attempt to defend and extend the coherence and integrity of our selves and our values over time, in the face of the apparently insuperable problems posed by our deaths.[219]

If this is an accurate assessment of our response to our predicament, then we can easily imagine why conflicts in valuation would be individually or collectively concerning since they jeopardize the future continuation of that which I value and, thus, my own continuing connection to it. Moreover, we might also conjecture that our expectation that the future will perpetuate these values, affirms our present-day valuation of their importance and, by proxy, our own value as persons by the implicit agreement with our judgments. Of course we cannot confirm this future affirmation, but we can anticipate and work toward it. Our ability to control the transmission of our values is, therefore, doubly important. In this way, we maintain our participation in the future, albeit in absentia.[220]

Scheffler concludes that our need for a collective afterlife means that we have a stake in humanity's "survival", even more so than we do in our own.[221] This

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[218] Ibid., 33.

[219] Ibid., 35.

[220] From Scheffler's conclusions, one might also conjecture that the future's perpetuation of these preservations affirms the importance of our present-day values and, by implication, our importance: an affirmation we cannot confirm but can at least anticipate. Not only would this retention allow us to feel at home in such a future but the shared recognition of value in a sense even creates the positive relations between our present selves and those who we imagine inhabit the future. It also seems probable that we expect (or at least hope) through our present actions to wield some measure of control over what the future values, and in so doing continue—in absentia—our participation. Finally, there is much overlap between Scheffler and Lifton's analyses of the human response to mortality. In particular, both emphasize the critical importance of the human desire for a sense of connection or "ties with both biological fellows and history, past and future." Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 277.

[221] Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 77-81. This is not to say that humanity's existence matters solely for this reason. Scheffler also acknowledges "the strongly social character of human valuing". A meaningful life depends upon the possibility of other human relationships; a solitary individual existence would be intolerable. Ibid., 79-80.

complements Lifton's assertion of our critical need to maintain "ties with both biological fellows and history, past and future."[222] Scheffler observes our "good fortune": while our individual "annihilation" is unavoidable, we do have some influence over the persistence of humanity as a whole.[223] Of course now even this capacity appears threatened as some warn of the increased possibility of humanity's extinction as a consequence of irreparable climate change.[224]

III. e. Immortality through Science and Technology: Increasing Humanity's Lifespan

There is no doubt, however, that scientific, economic, and even technological developments have dramatically altered humanity's experience and expectation of life and death;[225] accordingly, they have significantly transformed the human response to finitude. A markedly increased lifespan is one of the more notable differences. Kellehear suggests for those in "industrial societies" it now seems reasonable to anticipate living eighty or ninety years.[226] Even the number of centenarians continues to rise considerably; citing Thane, Kellehear states "[…] between 1911 and 1920 an average of 75 people annually reached the age of 100 in England and Wales. By 2000 that age group increased in those regions to 3000 annually."[227] In 2013, there were an estimated 13,830 centenarians living in the United Kingdom.[228] Infant mortality rates have decreased as well. In England and Wales, these fell 60% over a thirty-year period (1983-2013).[229] C. Ben Mitchell details similar changes in "life expectancy" for Americans in the last century: a woman born in 1900 could anticipate an average

[222] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 277.
[223] Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 77-79.
[224] This captures media attention: BBC, "Earth 'Entering New Extinction Phase' – US Study."
[225] For instance, the number of deaths resulting from neoplasms (including cancers) and cardiovascular diseases fell 28% in the decade preceding 2011, with the latter attributed partly to "advances in the field of medicine." Office for National Statistics, "Avoidable Deaths from Cardiovascular Disease Fell Sharply between 2001 and 2011 in England and Wales," accessed April 1, 2016, http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/subnational-health4/avoidable-mortality-in-england-and-wales/2011/sty-avoidable-mortality.html.
[226] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 202.
[227] Ibid., 201-02.
[228] Office for National Statistics, "Estimates of the Very Old (including Centenarians), 2002-2013, England and Wales; United Kingdom," accessed April 1, 2016, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mortality-ageing/estimates-of-the-very-old--including-centenarians-/2002---2013--england-and-wales--united-kingdom-/index.html.
[229] Office for National Statistics, "Deaths in England and Wales, 2013," accessed April 1, 2016, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/death-reg-sum-tables/2013/info-deaths-2013.html.

lifespan of 51.1 years, which increased to 71.7 in the mid-twentieth century, and was 82.7 by the century's end; the rate for men followed a similar pattern: increasing from 48.3 to 66 to 75.7.[230] Mitchell illustrates the impact of "longevity revolution" when he cites Dr. Ben Bova's remarkable claim: "'Physical immortality is within sight. There are people living today [1998] who may extend their life spans indefinitely.'"[231]

In contrast, the situation in eighteenth-century France made "early" death highly likely although the average life span increased to 32.1 years by the final decade.[232] Signaling the significant changes in attitudes since then, McManners observes that the eighteenth century's "permissible hope so far as duration is concerned, was much the same as ours [late twentieth century], except that theirs was barely permissible and ours is a confident assumption."[233] Certainly the picture he paints of the conditions under which people lived and died in eighteenth-century France is a bleak one, one that is now largely experientially unrecognizable to most in the West.[234] Unsurprisingly then, he describes the "'modern' attitude to death [as] […] the idea that we live out our standard ration of years, barring accidents".[235] Nevertheless, even eighteenth-century France saw improvements that would reshape people's previous assumptions. Brutal enforcement of quarantine during plague outbreaks and inoculation against smallpox were defenses waged against epidemic and disease;[236] with medical success hope increased and "among [the] educated" fatalism lessened its hold.[237] Indeed, Frenchmen living at the end of the century could expect on average to live ten years longer than those at the beginning.[238]

How long should a person expect to live? The answer continues to change. Without widespread "agreement on a 'natural' maximum life span", Kellehear argues, people's imaginations are boundless.[239] What began as tentative and meager hopes centuries earlier has blossomed in line with the progress and potential of science. Certainly the twenty-first century, some suggest, heralds the advent of greater

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[230] C. Ben Mitchell, "The Quest for Immortality" in *Aging, Death and the Quest for Immortality*, eds. C. Ben Mitchell, Robert D. Orr, and Susan A. Salladay (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 155.
[231] As quoted in ibid., 153.
[232] McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 5-23, 92.
[233] Ibid., 65.
[234] Ibid., 5-23.
[235] Ibid., 93.
[236] Ibid., 43-47.
[237] Ibid., 47.
[238] Ibid., 93.
[239] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 202.

opportunities to transcend finitude. For instance, Davies highlights the role of advancing genetic knowledge in the significant extension of life and wonders about the prospect of circumventing death altogether: "But what if my ailments, diseases and physical problems can be removed and repaired so that I can live for ever?"[240] This leads him to query both the theological and experiential implications of the absence of death. He asks: Would "a genetically engineered eternal earthly life […] be worth living?"[241] Still others, whom Elaine Graham describes, "envisage that technologies will overcome the problems of physical limitations (of strength and intelligence) and finitude (decay, disease, and death) by means of implants, modifications or enhancements."[242] After all, as she explains, "*transhumanists*" reject the assumption that limits are innate.[243] She agrees with Ed Regis' assessment that transhumanism's aim is "'immortality and transcendence'", which will be achieved not through religion as it was in the past, but science.[244] Moreover, as long as science continues to be mistaken for "magic", Gray argues, mortality will never cease to be an affront, for it trespasses on "the belief that for the human will, empowered by knowledge, nothing is impossible."[245] Indeed, he concludes, while attempts to find proof of post-mortem existence are largely a thing of the past, the expectation "that science" will be able to provide "a technological surrogate for immortality" is now even greater.[246] Gray traces this trend from early visionaries such as Robert Ettinger and Alan Harrington, who contributed to the growing interest in cryogenics through their writings in the late sixties (*The Prospect of Immortality* and *The Immortalist: An Approach to the Engineering of Man's Divinity*, respectively), to the present-day pronouncements of Ray Kurzweil (author of *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* and *Transcend: Nine Steps to Living Well Forever*), who anticipates a radical re-ordering of present biological functions and capacities, assisted by non-biological technologies.[247]

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[240] Davies, *Theology of Death*, 171.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 158.

[243] Ibid., 160.

[244] Ed Regis as quoted in ibid., 150.

[245] Gray, *Immortalization Commission*, 205.

[246] Ibid., 206.

[247] Ibid., 208, 13-14. Gray also describes at length the attempt to preserve Lenin's body after his death in 1924, including Leonid Krasin's use of early cryogenic practices. The entire project became known as "The Immortalization Commission." Ibid., 157-70.

Of course, the full realization of these hopes still lies in the future, if indeed it lies anywhere at all. The numerous wars and natural disasters of the twenty-first century do little to suggest that the future will have any less potential to cause sudden death, regardless of the number of years by which a life has already been extended. However, many are still banking on the future's potential to overcome present finitude. For instance, 138 of the 1,332 members of the Alcor Life Extension Foundation have already undergone cryopreservation in anticipation of just such a future.[248] In 2014 a couple in Thailand made arrangements with Alcor (located in Arizona, USA) for the cryopreservation of their daughter, who was suffering from ependymoblastoma (a brain cancer) and would not survive; after she was proclaimed "legally dead" on January 8, 2015 she underwent cryopreservation, at the age of two.[249] Cryonics, as Alcor describes it, functions on the premise that "a person beyond help by today's medicine" can be preserved at significantly low temperatures until a time in the future—perhaps "decades or centuries" later—when "medical technology can restore that person to full health."[250] "Patients", as Alcor refers to them, are not considered dead since death, it insists, occurs only when "cell structure and chemistry become so disorganized that *no technology* could restore that original state".[251] Therefore, cryopreservation's aim is "to prevent death" for as long as is needed until the necessary "recovery" can take place, that is, when future medical advances will have made it possible.[252] When this occurs a person's conscious life will resume and he or she will once again be together with family and friends to enjoy earthly life.[253]

Such a progressivist vision rests upon the assumption of many things: including the expectation that the future world will be benevolent as well as technologically advanced. In other words, it will be the kind of world in which one

[248] These figures were current to May 31, 2015. Admin, "Membership Numbers Update, May 31, 2015," *Alcor News* (blog), Alcor Life Extension Foundation, June 8, 2015, http://www.alcor.org/blog/membership-may-31-2015/.

[249] Admin, Max More and Aaron Drake, "Two-Year Old Thai Girl Becomes Alcor's 134th Patient," March 20, 2015, http://www.alcor.org/blog/two-year-old-thai-girl-becomes-alcors-134rd-patient/.

[250] "About Cryonics: What is Cryonics?" Alcor Life Extension Foundation, accessed August 5, 2015. http://alcor.org/AboutCryonics/index.html.

[251] Ibid.

[252] Ibid.

[253] Obviously, this is dependent on friends and family having also undergone cryopreservation. Regarding the Thai case Alcor writes: "Matheryn's family, extending well beyond her mother and father, were supportive and have said they plan to also make cryopreservation arrangements with Alcor. No doubt being surrounded by familiar faces of living relatives will make the resumption of her life – as we hope and expect to happen – easier and more joyful." Admin, Max More and Aaron Drake, "Two-Year Old Thai Girl."

would want to continue living. Yet is it not just as likely one might awake under the harsh rule of a despot or in intolerable living conditions? Indeed, Gray warns:

> […] all technical fixes for mortality suffer from a common limitation. They assume that the society in which they are developed will survive intact, along with the planetary environment. Advocates of cryonic suspension who believe they will be resuscitated after centuries of technical progress imagine that the society into which they will be resurrected will be much the same as it was […].
>
> A more likely scenario is that science will advance against a background of war and revolution. That is what happened in the twentieth century […].
>
> Moreover, those who have benefited from life-extension techniques could find themselves in an environment that is increasingly inhospitable to human life.[254]

In addition, such practices enter difficult ethical territory. How should we regard a process whereby only those fortunate enough to have access to modern technology and finances are given the opportunity for extending existence? Moreover, what if another person's beliefs and desires regarding mortality are in conflict with one's own? What if family or friends do not wish to be preserved? In May 2015, Mariette Selkovitch (who was *not* an Alcor member and thus had not made any advance payment for preservation) underwent cryopreservation after suffering cardiac arrest; this procedure was done at the urgent request of her husband, who had been an Alcor member for twenty-one years.[255] Although Alcor acknowledged the exceptional nature of the case, they granted his time-sensitive request just as they had seven years earlier for his 101-year old mother.[256] The provisio for both was that Mr. Selkovitch made the necessary payments as soon as possible afterward.[257] While these circumstantial facts, which Alcor reported, do not allow definitive conclusions to be drawn from our interpretation of them, they leave open the possibility that neither his wife nor his mother desired cryopreservation. The absence of advance membership for both Mrs. Selkovitch's might have been indicative of their personal rejections of Mr. Selkovitch's cryopreservation plans. Given the fact that he had already been an Alcor member for twenty-one years, it seems likely they would have had ample

[254] Gray, *Immortalization Commission*, 209-10.

[255] Admin and Max More, "Mariette Selkovitch becomes ALCOR's 136th patient," *Alcor News* (blog), Alcor Life Extension Foundation, May 15, 2015, http://www.alcor.org/blog/mariette-selkovitch-becomes-alcors-136th-patient-on-may-5-2015/.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Ibid.

opportunity to join had they so desired. We might proffer a number of speculative reasons for this difference: perhaps they had doubts about cryopreservation's potential for success and chose, therefore, to spend their money on living the life they already had; perhaps, after 101 years in existence, the senior Mrs. Selkovitch simply preferred to embrace finitude; or, perhaps, one or both viewed life and death through the lens of a religious perspective in which immortality was already anticipated, but not as a result of human ingenuity.

Regardless of the reasons, the situation illustrates the moral complexity that accompanies any extension of life and the potential for conflict when varied understandings of reality shape that decision. While perhaps few would contest *any* attempt to prolong life, or desire to return to an era in which an early death was highly likely, neither would all embrace extreme attempts to achieve immortality. Yet one might also ask, if earthly immortality is achievable is there any reason not to pursue it? In other words, are there any innate benefits to finitude?

IV. Issues: Questions Raised by Finitude and Immortality

Woody Allen quipped "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work…I want to achieve it through not dying."[258] He would perhaps find fitting company with those who seek delivery from death through science rather than with those who readily accept it. Although his delivery is comic and concise, Allen's dark humour touches upon the deeply serious and profoundly personal nature of the issues mortality raises, neatly encapsulating some of the questions through which many approach the problem of death. Is immortality possible? And if so, how? Will it be found in this world or in another? Does surrogate immortality provide a meaningful alternative? Can our lives be extended so that we will never die? Moreover, would we really want that? Indeed, Martha C. Nussbaum queries this very desire:

> Human beings want to be immortal and ageless. And, perhaps even more clearly they want the human beings they love never to age, never to die. There seems to be little doubt of this. […] And yet we don't seem to know very clearly what it is we are wishing when we wish that.[259]

[258] As quoted in *Oxford Essential Quotations*, 2nd ed., ed. Susan Ratcliffe (Oxford University Press, 2012), s.v. "death." doi: 10.1093/acref/9780191794230.001.0001.

[259] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 368.

Among those who consider these issues, Bernard Williams's objection to immortality is often noted: namely, his assertion that life would cease to be meaningful or enjoyable if it were extended without end.[260] In addition, Graham contends that the "uncritical embrace of technological omnipotence, omniscience and immortality betrays not so much a love of life as, paradoxically, a pathological fear of death, vulnerability and finitude"; hence, the twenty-first century pursuit of a "digitalized post-biological humanity" frequently manifests contempt for innate human limits, particularly "the mortality of the flesh."[261]

Certainly, in its long experience with finitude humanity has known much conquest, and boundaries, which once seemed impassable, have been finally overcome, although others stubbornly persist. While many embrace the pendulum's apparent swing toward omnipotence and endless existence, others urge caution.[262] Bauckham characterizes some of these efforts toward transcendence as usurping the realization of a future-already-promised, specifically that which is described in the latter part of the Christian narrative:

> The project of creating post-humans is yet another example of the modern attempt to make immanent reality what Christian eschatology expects from the transcendent power of God: in this case, the glorified humanity of the exalted Christ and those who will be like him in the resurrection.[263]

By comparison, Ruether, Walls argues, makes "acceptance of finitude" a "morally superior stance"—one that avoids the selfish "individualism" she sees as intrinsic to a personal "hope for eternal life".[264] For her part, Nussbaum suggests the appropriate relationship to transcendence includes moving beyond those boundaries whereby one achieves "excellence" (as an athlete does) while recognizing and remaining within those which define our humanity: "One is to hate and fear the thought of their [others'] death, to try to prevent it by any means one can—and yet to know that a

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[260] For instance, Walls cites Williams in his discussion of "challenges to heaven", as arguing "that the whole idea of eternal happiness is incoherent because no matter how delightful the joys of heaven, they would eventually inevitably become boring." Jerry L. Walls, "Heaven," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 406. See also Section 5.2 "Immortality is a Misfortune" in Steven Luper, "Death," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2009 ed. (Stanford University, 2009), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/death/. Even Scheffler makes a passing reference to Williams' objection of ennui: Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 63.

[261] Graham, *Post/Human*, 230.

[262] For instance, urging caution appears to be the aim of Nicholas Agar, *Humanity's End: Why We Should Reject Radical Enhancement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

[263] Richard Bauckham, "Conclusion: Emerging Issues in the Twenty-First Century," in Walls, *Eschatology*, 678.

[264] Walls, "Heaven," 409.

mortal life is the only life in which the people one loves could actually be. This tension […] seems to be a part of the best human life."[265] Of course, this begs the question: which limits define our humanity? Which are central to being human? Similarly, what, if anything, do we gain through finitude that once lost we would wish we had retained? Is finitude intrinsic to our humanity or only a temporary and alterable condition? As Graham demonstrates, the apparent limit-transcending properties of more recent developments—"digital, cybernetic and biomedical"—effectively prompt an ontological reassessment "of what it means to be human."[266] In particular, the relationship of virtual to material embodiment introduces critical questions about the essence of human existence.[267] For instance, how does digitization alter our understanding of human identity?[268] Or, what is "the relationship between body and self"?[269] These questions, among others, form the basis of issues and moral dilemmas that, perhaps uniquely, characterize our contemporary situation.

IV. a. Contemporary Issues: Timing Death, Defining Life

While the developed Western World has enjoyed a marked increase in lifespan as a result of eliminating or controlling many of the previous causes of early death, longevity has also opened the door to (more frequent) occurrences of other terminal, debilitating, or dignity-robbing diseases such as cancer, stroke, or Alzheimers.[270] These in turn have brought the question of *when* death *should* occur to the fore. Kellehear argues that "timing death" is now the central concern of the present age:[271]

> When is the right time to die in the overall course of a lifetime? The answer is probably: Before or After. Before or after what, you may well ask. Clearly, before the all-out attempts to prevent it that leave the dying person with little identity, health or dignity that come from multiple surgery, feeding and breathing tubes or a deteriorating, unrecognisable body image. This desire is

[265] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 380-81.
[266] Graham, *Post/Human*, 1.
[267] Graham explores some of these; see ibid., 188-97.
[268] Ibid., 187.
[269] Ibid., 187-88.
[270] For instance, the number of both male and female deaths from Alzheimer's increased during 2002-2012. Office for National Statistics, "Deaths Registered in England and Wales (Series DR), 2012, accessed April 1, 2016, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/mortality-statistics--deaths-registered-in-england-and-wales--series-dr-/2012/stb-deaths-registered-in-england-and-wales-in-2012-by-cause.html#tab-Comparing-leading-causes-of-death-in-2002-and-2012.
[271] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 234. For a posthuman version of this see Braidotti, *Posthuman*, 135.

> particularly applicable to the highly serviced and managed experience of dying. The after must apply to normative ideas of a long life, which is also partly the aim of not letting people die "too soon", "before their time" or before "everything that can be done for them is seen to be done for them".[272]

This concern has increased as medical developments have allowed life to be artificially prolonged through multiple resuscitations, ongoing life support, or other not-always-successful "interventions";[273] these heroic measures often leave a person suspended between life and death, rather than clearly in one state or the other—a condition that has been aptly described as "a 'living death'".[274] As Kellehear also observes, many take deliberate action to avoid such circumstances: living wills and euthanasia are two means by which some actively seek to control when death occurs.[275]

Of course, behind "when" lies the deeper question of what it means to be "alive" in the first place. While, as Steven Luper suggests, death may be regarded as "the irreversible discontinuation of the vital processes by which we are sustained", it is less clear how to regard "what we *are*, and the conditions under which we persist."[276] What of "us" must continue in existence in order to be considered "alive"? In the three possible perspectives Luper outlines—animalism, personism, and mindism—that which each assumes is necessary for the continuation of life differs so significantly that a person might be regarded as both dead and alive simultaneously, depending upon the viewpoint held.[277] He suggests several potential instances of conflict: If "we are human beings" (animalism) and death results from "cessation of the vital processes" which maintain that, then a person who is left in a "persistent vegetative state" after part of her brain is destroyed would still be considered alive;[278] however, if "we are minds" (mindism) then death has already occurred.[279] Similarly, if it is our "capacity for self-awareness" (personism) that determines existence, then when certain "psychological features" are lost as a result of dementia, a person could be considered dead, whereas for the mindist he or she would not be.[280] In addition, Luper imagines a scenario in which the brain is enabled to survive apart from the

[272] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 236.
[273] Ibid., 247.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Luper, "Death," 1.2.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.

body, which "is destroyed": this is death according to the animalist, but to the mindist, the persistence of life.[281] Therefore, it is evident that death as the antithesis of life can only be determined when life has been clearly defined; moreover, without agreement on the latter, it will be impossible to reach agreement on when death occurs.

IV. b. Reassessing Value and Transience

Regardless of how one defines "life", it is generally true that, as Nussbaum observes, our desire for those we care about is that they remain alive.[282] There appears to a natural relationship between valuing something (in this instance, persons) and wanting it (or them) to endure. Indeed, Scheffler argues that humanity values by "conservatism";[283] that is, we want things we value "to be sustained or preserved."[284] Death circumvents that desire for persons, just as transience and finitude, in general, limit other things we value. Moreover, Scheffler asserts, to value and preserve something is to exert control over transience:

> […] in valuing, we lay claim to the future—we arrogate to ourselves the authority to make judgments about how the future *should* unfold. In a sense, valuing is a way of trying to control time. It is an attempt to impose a set of standards on time and to make it answerable to us. To value something is to resist the transitoriness of time; it is to insist that the passage of time lacks normative authority. Things may come and things may go, but *we* decide what matters. *Man* is the measure of all things; Protagoras's dictum, understood in this way, sounds a defiant, even hubristic note. Time does not have the last word; it does not tell us what is important.[285]

Yet the meaningfulness of this valuation is contingent upon humanity's continuation; this is, he proposes, in part why humanity's imminent destruction appears so terrible.[286]

> Humanity itself as an ongoing, historical project provides the implicit reference for most of our judgments about what matters. Remove that frame of

[281] Ibid. For example, Alcor's cryopreservation strategies for the brain logically result from their understanding of "person" and "life"; they argue for cryonic's potential success in this way: "If survival of the structure means survival of the person" and "if cold can preserve essential structure […]" then a "preserved" person could be restored if "the basic brain structure encoding memory and personality remain intact." See "About Cryonics."

[282] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 368.

[283] Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 22-23.

[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid., 61.

[286] Ibid., 193-94.

> reference, and our sense of importance—however individualistic it may be in its overt content—is destabilized and begins to erode.[287]

However, as Seana Valentine Shiffrin argues in her critique of Scheffler's proposal, the relationship between value, conservatism, and the future is also far more complex.[288] In particular, she points to exceptions we generally make for things we value that occur as events, such as listening to a piece of aesthetically pleasing music or eating delicious food.[289] We expect and accept their transience, although we also value them. At the very least, their temporal disappearance prevents the boredom or loss of uniqueness that would result from their endless repetition; hence, she concludes "it seems that there are some valuable (and valued) things that should *not* be sustained but, rather, should come to an end."[290] Likewise, she suggests that the circumstances of human existence are comparable: finitude prevents "it from turning sour, dull, and routine, but its having an end contributes to its significance" and "poignancy".[291] (This was Keats's conclusion in "Ode on Melancholy".) Thus, she concludes more generally, there are times when "valuing something involves actively wanting or seeking, at the appropriate time, its end."[292] She argues, in contrast to Scheffler, that what concerns us most about the "collective afterlife's" future existence is not that it allows our valued items or projects continuance, but that it ensures our approach to valuing would itself endure: "It matters that valuing for reasons does not end abruptly—for no reason—and that the practice of history—that is, of remembering who existed and understanding what they valued—continues" regardless what kind of beings do this, human or otherwise.[293] Moreover, while transience and loss are generally regarded as part and parcel of the human experience, the degree to which this is viewed negatively or positively depends in part upon whether or not a thing's value and meaning are upheld even in its finitude. In other words, a change resulting in loss does not necessarily diminish the original

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[287] Ibid., 60.

[288] Scheffler agrees that valuing has greater complexity than the picture he initially paints. Ibid., 191-92.

[289] Seana Valentine Schiffrin, "Preserving the Valued or Preserving Valuing," in *Death and the Afterlife*, ed. Niko Kolodny (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199982509.001.0001, 145. Scheffler makes the observation that her exceptional examples are all events. Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 191.

[290] Schiffrin, "Preserving Valuing," 145.

[291] Ibid., 145-46.

[292] Ibid., 146.

[293] Ibid., 155.

declaration of value.[294] Therefore, Shiffrin proposes that the *unwarranted* and *premature* loss of something valuable is more disturbing to us than if that same loss results from a deliberate decision that upholds similar values (as in the case of improvements);[295] therefore, she concludes, we care *why* something is lost most of all.[296]

Both Scheffler and Shriffin (and the others) have elucidated several important points concerning humanity's relationship with transience: first, the desire for immortality or continuity as one cause of our antagonistic relationship with finitude; second, the necessity of a collective afterlife (in the absence of a real one) for attainment of meaning; thirdly, the unique, beneficial contribution of finitude to human existence. From these and other previous insights we might surmise that immortality and finitude are both important to the human experience. Our preservation of that which we value acknowledges the former while acceptance of limitations affirms that which uniquely makes us human.

Bauckham offers Moltmann's eschatological vision as a successful reconciliation (in theory) of these tensions; while it would be "tragic" if nothing at all were preserved, it would be equally so if humanity had never known finitude. Accordingly, eternity provides an affirmation of both:

> All times will be gathered into eternity. All that is past will be brought back into an eternal compresence, participating in a creaturely way in the eternity of God (CoG 294-295). In this way the whole creation, in its whole diachronic extent, will be redeemed from transience. In this way, Moltmann's eschatology allows for the double-sided character of transience. On the one hand, the fact that that present creation happens in transient time is essential to the kind of goodness it has. Nothing like it is conceivable without the irreversible flow of time. On the other hand, the continuous loss of what is good in the present as it passes away and the ultimate loss of everything, which transience entails, would make the world deeply tragic were there not the prospect of the recovery in eternity of all that has been lost in transient time.[297]

It remains, then, to uncover how humanity understands and resolves these tensions in practice, especially as it encounters manifestations of finitude that challenge even the perdurance of its surrogate immortalities. To do so we now turn to examine mortality and immortality, as it is present in and through art.

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[294] See her varied examples of this: Ibid., 150-51.
[295] Ibid., 149-52 .
[296] Ibid., 152
[297] Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," 183.

V. Uncanny Resemblance: The Mortality and Immortality of Art

In this chapter we have examined the frameworks through which humanity responds to its finitude and seeks immortality. In chapter two we will explore the corresponding frameworks through which aesthetic finitude is addressed and immortality asserted. Thus, we will begin to test the general contention that humanity's expectations of and response to aesthetic finitude mirror in certain important respects the expectations of and response to its own finitude. How is the response to aesthetic finitude a manifestation of the response to human finitude? How is the work of art both the *means* of achieving human continuity or immortality and the *reflection* of the human concern for permanence?

Art's apparent capacity for making transient things permanent is widely acknowledged. The "enduring work of art" has long been regarded as a means by which past events, persons, and even moments can be captured and rendered immortal.[298] Dante Gabriel Rossetti described the sonnet as "a moment's monument".[299] Bauckham describes Claude Monet's aim as "record[ing] the visual impression of colour and harmony which a scene made on him in a moment that is unique and evanescent, pictured on the point of disappearing."[300] Chris Townsend depicts the self-portrait as "a posthumous gamble for transcendence" which "reclaims the artist, as subject, for *a possible future*, through the immediacy of the painterly gesture."[301] These examples acknowledge that the ephemeral nature of life requires something *other* to preserve it. This is a truth partly alluded to in the aphorism "life is short, art is long". Longfellow addressed this condition in "A Psalm of Life":

> Art is long, and time is fleeting,
> And our hearts, though stout and brave,
> Still, like muffled drums, are beating
> Funeral marches to the grave.[302]

Both centuries-old portraits and architectural structures of ancient civilizations conjure up strong images of longevity and endurance, even as they stand witness to

[298] Gordon Graham uses this phrase. Gordon Graham, "Nature," in Adams, Pattison, and Ward, *European Thought*, 404.

[299] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jerome McGann (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 127.

[300] Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," 214-15.

[301] Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008), 10.

[302] Longfellow, *Poems*, 4.

the absence of those they represent. Gordon Graham takes note of this preservative quality of art when he describes the Enlightenment approach to nature and aesthetics:

> the transience and degeneration to which the beauty of landscapes, sunsets and the like is inevitably subject, can be transcended without aesthetic loss—and even improved a little, perhaps—when it is captured within an enduring work of art—a painting.[303]

In his exploration of the eschatological ends of the universe, John Polkinghorne points to a similar aesthetic capacity when he states: "For many people, art provides the window through which they glimpse a sight of an everlasting reality underlying the flux of the changing world."[304] He cites Richard Bauckham's insightful observation of "the way in which artistic experience 'enables us to indwell the moment that otherwise escapes us'".[305] Bauckham describes these as encounters of "pure presentness" in which the past and the future are subsumed in the "eternal Now", and rendered momentarily irrelevant.[306] One is reminded of Lifton's category of "experiential transcendence" in which a person ceases to be aware of her temporality.[307]

However, while the enduring and arresting nature of art allows it to function in this unique way, it is like its human creators and the rest of the material world in that it is also subject to transience and decay. These hints of immortality or eternity, therefore, can only be temporary and finite. Hence, Bauckham notes that whereas "representational art can be the attempt to anticipate God's new creation out of transience, it does not create eternity, since it is transient, but it is an image of eternity within transience and gives the experience of the eternal moment in time."[308] Art is thus a foretaste of something it does not in itself embody. In this way, both mortality and immortality are present in the work of art. Art both preserves the transient and suffers from transience—a preservation paradox which may provide a rich analogue for exploring our own human intimations of immortality amidst mortality. Yet, for a variety of reasons, the transient character of art has not always been fully acknowledged or embraced. Nevertheless aesthetic finitude, like human finitude, has always provoked a response—one that, in practice, has borne a striking resemblance

[303] Graham, "Nature," 404.
[304] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 34.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," 186, 201-03, 216-17.
[307] Lifton, "Sense of Immortality," 279.
[308] Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," 194-95.

to its human counterpart. That is, our response to the problem of human mortality and immortality has been mirrored in our approach to and concern for art's longevity. Perhaps it should not surprise us that actions emanating from core beliefs are manifest in multiple forms. As Moltmann aptly observes, "Our attitudes to life and our plans for living always reflect our attitudes to death."[309] Art's centrality to human culture, therefore, makes such an attitudinal and behavioral crossover likely.[310]

If our scientific and technological progress has led us to ask what it means to be human, alive, and to explore the boundaries that define us, then it has also caused very similar questions to emerge in regard to the work of art. These include the deeply complex question: What is the work of art? This is not the age-old controversy of aesthetic and cultural qualifications for art, but an ontological inquiry into the nature of a work's existence and thus its requirements for persistence. Instead, one is led to ask: What is the relationship between a work's materiality and immateriality? Or, between the original and the replica? Which efforts of conservation preserve the work and which obscure or destroy it? When, if ever, does a work die? These, among many others, are questions about the mortality and immortality of art. As is true for similar questions regarding humanity, the answers throughout history have been varied.

In the subsequent chapters, therefore, art will serve as both a guide to and a manifestation of the human response to finitude—an aesthetic analogue of our desires and expectations for continuity both within and without religious frameworks that address human transience. As such, art offers an opportunity to re-examine the relationship between something's value and its finitude as well as to explore how acceptance of finitude reveals and affirms important aspects of being human. For the Christian, art may model transformative possibilities that give a foretaste of eschatological reality. Moreover, when aesthetic finitude is allowed its equal place the believer may also be reminded whence her hope of immortality actually lies. Indeed,

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[309] Moltmann, *In the End*, 119.

[310] Both Ellen Dissanayake and Nicholas Wolterstorff make a case for art's centrality: "In every human society of which we know—prehistoric, ancient, or modern—whether hunter–gatherer, pastoral, agricultural, or industrial, at lease some form of art is displayed, and not only displayed but highly regarded and willingly engaged in." Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (1992; repr., Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999) 34. "The purposes of art are the purposes of life. To envisage human existence without art is not to envisage human existence. Art—so often thought of as a way of getting out in the world—is man's way of acting *in* the world. *Artistically man acts*." Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 4-5.

through its persistent finitude, art may provide a corrective to hubris by re-establishing creaturely boundaries and recovering what it means to be human.

Chapter 2

Between Finite and Eternal: The Mortality and Immortality of Art

I. Prologue

Certainly, in subject matter, art has been a rich repository of meditations on death. The vanitas paintings of the seventeenth-century Netherlands are amongst the most familiar instances of this.[1] These still-life depictions of skulls and other objects emblematic of finitude were sombre reflections on life's transience.[2] More recently, the work of contemporary artist Damian Hirst has become well known for its articulations of death.[3] His 1991 "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living"—a thirteen-foot formaldehyde-preserved shark encased in 3 contiguous glass cubes—provides a striking visual encounter with mortality.[4] In an interview with Alistair Sooke, Hirst said: "You try and avoid [death], but it's such a big thing that you can't. That's the frightening thing isn't it?"[5] As these works recognize, mortality and immortality are aspects of human existence that are worth considering and, therefore, apt subjects for aesthetic exploration. However, mortality and immortality are represented not only *in* art but also *by* art. Humans have responded to their finitude and desire for immortality through the medium of aesthetic immortality; human perdurance has been linked to the artwork's perdurance through the mode of surrogate immortality; similarly, aesthetic impermanence has served as an apt reminder of human transience. Moreover, the manner in which aesthetic finitude has been addressed has mirrored the response to human finitude, with the emphasis on transcendence of the latter matched by an equal emphasis on aesthetic preservation. Yet these two spheres of response—aesthetic and human—are not

[1] Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Vanitas," in *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed March 6, 2015, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T087870.

[2] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, *Oxford Art Online*, s.v. "vanitas," accessed March 6, 2015, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t4/e1731; *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "vanitas," accessed March 6, 2015, http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/623056/vanitas; Helen Langdon, "Vanitas," in *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*. *Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed March 6, 2015, http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t118/e2664.

[3] Townsend, *Art and Death,* 38.

[4] DamianHirst.com, "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, 1991," ed. Amie Corry, accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.damienhirst.com/the-physical-impossibility-of.

[5] Quoted in ibid.

necessarily separate ones; while they run parallel and reflect each other, they also, in many ways, overlap and fulfil one another.

Perhaps one of the reasons this parallel response has been manifest in art is that artworks have often been invested with qualities normally reserved for animate beings—that is, of existing or being alive. While the origins of this practice are outside the scope of this thesis, it may be that the nature of aesthetic experience gives the impression that engaging with a work of art is similar to interacting with something living. That is, in the encounter with a work of art one experiences something as far more than the sum of its individual parts—something whose immateriality appears to be as important as, or sometimes more important than, its materiality. Given this perceptual curiosity, how should we understand the mortality and immortality of art? How has it been perceived, pursued, or challenged? This chapter will investigate these questions, exploring the territory art occupies between the finite and the eternal.

II. The Living Work of Art

> "Art is alive; it makes your eyes pop and knees shimmy."[6]

Curiously, it is common to find discourse about works of art that borrows words from the language of the living. Artworks have been variously referred to as alive or dead, as mortal or immortal, as possessing a spirit, a soul, or an afterlife, and as living or existing forever. One normally expects to hear such terminology, with its biological and religious overtones, as part of philosophical or theological inquiries into the nature and boundaries of human existence. Yet the frequency of its occurrence suggests the practice should not be dismissed as *merely* poetic license. Blurred distinctions between animate and inanimate, material and immaterial are ontologically significant when considering the nature of art. Therefore, the application of such terms to inanimate entities warrants further attention. What does their usage reveal about the perceived nature of aesthetic existence? More specifically, what are the implications for an artwork's persistence? This practice of referencing artworks as living suggests a number of critical questions requiring answers if we are to

[6] Joyce C. Scott, "Immortality/Immorality," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 76.

understand these implications: How is "life" determined without biological markers? When does the death of a work occur? Is a work's aesthetic presence bounded by its materiality or does it exceed and exist beyond it? Does a work possess an immaterial spirit that perdures even in the instance of material absence or loss? What is the relationship between a work's value and its continuing existence? What are the implications for conserving and preserving a *living* work of art? Furthermore, how should loss in or of a work be understood and approached? These and other similar questions have been variously answered and disputed; yet they remain central to any discussion of perdurance in art.

Although the general thrust of these questions might lead one to initially assume that works of art are exclusively composed of inorganic or inanimate material, we know of course that this is not necessarily the case. Performative works, in particular, are "live" in a true sense in that they employ people or animals in their presentation and generally occur temporally. For example, although now primarily known through photographic stills and film clips, Joseph Bueys' interaction with a live coyote formed the key element of "I Like America and America Likes Me".[7] Likewise, it is the embodied action of the living dancer, actor, or musician that constitutes the "work" of performance in tandem with other non-living components: sound waves are produced as a musician draws her bow across the strings of a violin. Both the animate and inanimate components are essential. In these instances, performative works are bounded by their temporal nature, coming into and out of existence in time, according to the actions of the participants. Erika Fischer-Lichte draws attention to this relationship of performative co-existence:

> Both presence and the dramatic character are brought forth through specific processes of embodiment. The character does not come into being as a replica of an external, predetermined sphere but is instead generated through the very process of embodiment. Each character is bound to the specific corporeality of the actor who engenders it. […] It [the character] does not exist beyond the individual body.[8]

Thus, in a limited sense, some works of art do exist biologically in that their constituent parts are themselves living entities. Moreover, unlike paintings or sculptures, such works are events that take place in time, rather than exist as static

[7] For a detailed description and photo-documentation of their interaction see Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: Coyote* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008).

[8] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (London: Routledge, 2008), 147-48.

objects. Yet the existentially charged language of mortality and immortality is not exclusive to works in possession of human, floral, or faunal elements. These terms have also been applied to paintings, sculptures, installations, and architecture (buildings and monuments). The resulting ontological ambiguity complicates any discussion of the permanence or impermanence of art. What does it mean for *these* works to be either alive or dead?

In his discussion of Michel Delacroix's *Melting Plot* as illustrative of contemporary issues in conservation, Julián Zugazagoitia asks "Can we conceive of wanting to preserve a work at the cost of its soul?"[9] While Zugazagoitia's question echoes the theological concern expressed in Mark 8:36, his non-religious usage of "soul" in this instance most probably reflects a more modern, parallel preoccupation:[10] namely, disquietude regarding medical advances that have made it possible to sustain bodily functions well beyond what many consider "living". Indeed, Davies notes that, in the twenty-first century, "the nature of [human] life and the process of death has come in for hitherto unknown scrutiny" as the "ability to sustain life in the near-dead and to foster life in the infertile […] outruns the capacity of theologians, philosophers and the new generations of ethicists to define life and death."[11] Our increased capacity to preserve "life" has inadvertently complicated how we understand it. For instance, technological advances have introduced the possibility of virtual—as opposed to embodied—existence. Difficult questions have followed: How should we understand the relationship between the body (matter) and spirit of a person? Are they demonstrably separate or inextricably interconnected? How does loss or change in one affect the other? Zugazagoitia's aesthetic query is similar; he wonders whether preservation—the act of "embalm[ing] for eternity", which addresses the longevity of a work—can ever succeed in retaining the artistic "élan vital".[12] The language of his query suggests that conservation runs the risk of preserving the exterior shells of works, while losing that which gives them life—the

[9] Julián Zugazagoitia, "Michel Delacroix's Melting Plot," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, xiv. This 1998 work (*Melting Plot*) was commissioned by the Getty Conservation Institute "[t]o represent the concerns surrounding the conservation of twentieth-century art". The installation underwent significant change over a period of three days as first names composed of individual wax letters were slowly released from their ordered containment in ice as it melted. Ibid.

[10] "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mk. 8:36 (KJV)

[11] Davies, *Theology of Death*, 4.

[12] Zugazagoitia, "Michel Delacroix's Melting Plot," xiv.

creative, animating force, which Zugazagoitia argues, "persists" beyond any individual manifestation of it, just as life does in nature.[13]

Although linguistically the term "soul" can be used simply to refer to "[t]he essential, fundamental, animating, or vital part or feature" of a *material* object, the word's longstanding association with both immortality and the immaterial aspect of a person is not so easily disconnected, especially in the historically Christian West.[14] This is evident in John Ruskin's ardent protests against the restoration of buildings during the Victorian era; they presuppose the possession of a vital presence akin to that of a person—one which when lost yields death:

> Do not let us deceive ourselves in this important matter; it is *impossible*, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture. That which I have above insisted upon as the life as the whole, the spirit which is given only by the hand and eye of the workman, can never be recalled. Another spirit may be given by another time, and it is then a new building; but the spirit of the dead workman cannot be summoned up, and commanded to direct other hands, and other thoughts.[15]

There is more than a hint of the role of Divine Creator, the source of animating life, in the actions of Ruskin's mortal workman. Through activity reminiscent of the Genesis creation account, whereby God fashions man from the dust and breathes life into him, this workman likewise gives life to inanimate stone.[16] Given Ruskin's not infrequent use of religious justifications for aesthetic convictions, this implicit parallel is all the more likely.[17] William Morris, a fellow advocate and contemporary of Ruskin,

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[13] Zugazagoitia states: "Inevitably, ice melts, yet life persists; the forces of nature are there to remind us that everything is transformation." Ibid.

[14] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "soul, n.," 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, accessed July 7, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185083?rskey=8JOahZ&result=1.

[15] As quoted in Stephen Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration: A Study in English Restoration Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), 106. When George Steiner describes cities that have been rebuilt to their former glory, there is a similar sense of the impossibility of restoring life. While outwardly they appear the same, Steiner ruefully admits: "The perfection of renewal has a lacquered depth. As if the light in the cornices had not been restored, as if the air were inappropriate and carried still an edge of fire. There is nothing mystical to this impression; it is almost painfully literal. It may be that the coherence of an ancient thing is harmonic with time, that the perspective of a street, of a roof-line that have lived their natural being, can be replicated but not recreated (even where it is, ideally, indistinguishable from the original, reproduction is not the vital form.)" Steiner, *Bluebeard's Castle*, 51-52.

[16] See Gen. 2:7; Ps. 104:29-30. Although the focus is different, a similar concept of life transfer occurs in Steiner's writing: "The sculptor commits to the stone vitalities against and across time which will soon drain from his own living hand." Of course, Steiner's emphasis is the artist's "gamble on transcendence": the attempt to create something that will endure beyond his own mortal life. Ibid., 71.

[17] For instance, see "The Lamp of Sacrifice" III-IX in John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 2nd ed., with an introduction by Selwyn Image (London: J. M. Dent, n.d.), 9-21.

follows suit in his anti-restoration writings and similarly appeals to the living nature of a building:

> From this lack and this game arose in men's minds the strange idea of the Restoration of ancient buildings; a strange and most fatal idea, which, by its very name, implies that it is possible to strip from a building this, that, and the other part of its history – of its life, that is, and then to stay the hand at some arbitrary point, and leave it still historical, living, and even as it once was.
>
> […], and there is no laying to rest in the spectator the suspicion of what may have been lost; and, in short, a feeble and lifeless forgery is the final result of all the wasted labour.
>
> […] to consider whether it be possible to Restore those buildings, the living spirit of which, it cannot be too often repeated, was an inseparable part of that religion and thought, and those past manners.[18]

The possibility of destroying or losing "the living spirit" of a work by altering its material history was, to those opposing restoration, a monumental danger. A living building deserved respect for the entirety of its past.

While the types of aesthetic objects under discussion may have changed since the nineteenth century, similar language, emphasizing the immaterial aspect of a work and the complexity in preserving it, continues to be present in contemporary discourse. Reflecting on these issues in light of the work of Andy Goldsworthy, Thomas K. Reese stresses the importance of perceiving an artist's works in terms of their "essential character" or spirit, rather than merely their material components:[19]

> Such works challenge conservators to go beyond defining their role as the "rescuers" of the "material fragments" of activities that they "save" for future generations; instead they must enter into the critical spirit of the works themselves if they are to save and transmit not merely decontextualized fragments but their essence to the future.[20]

Goldsworthy himself emphasizes the vitality of his works when he describes the scope and role of photo-documentation:

> Each [ephemeral] work grows, stays, decays — integral parts of a cycle which the photography shows at its height, marking the moment when the work is

[18] As quoted in Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration*, 144-45.

[19] Reese focuses in particular on Goldsworthy's "clay helix" a 1997 "site-specific earthen sculpture" commissioned for the Getty Center, which became a "new ruin" performance as the clay naturally dried and cracked beneath the center's skylight. Thomas F. Reese, "New Ruins," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 25-27, 33.

[20] Ibid., 25.

> most alive. […] The photographs leave the reason and spirit of the work outside. They are not the purpose but the result of my art.[21]

Goldsworthy's language leaves little doubt that the work (and indeed his creative process) is far from static, but grows and changes within a cycle of existence, the pinnacle of which the camera records. At one level, Goldsworthy's media (grasses, leaves, ice, etc.) do nothing more than manifest the processes of transformation and decay that are already present in their natures.[22] Hence, one might argue that the life of the work, is composed of *their* natural life, not its own. Yet Goldsworthy seems to suggest something more: that through the marriage of these constituents and creativity, something new (the work) comes into being, which possesses a dynamic life or spirit of its own.[23]

Regardless of the century in which such discussions occur, the perceived relationship between "the work" and its material manifestation strongly influences the way in which preservation is approached and understood.[24] As evidenced by the debate during Ruskin's era, this can be a subject fraught with conflict.[25] Some have suggested that such tensions arise in part from a Western insistence on the original material manifestation as critical to the work's being or identity.[26] Walter Benjamin has argued that the genuineness of a work, which includes "everything about it since its creation that can be handed down, from its material duration to the historical witness that it bears", cannot be reproduced.[27] Yet Pip Laurenson observes that while maintaining the "(physical) integrity of [the artwork as] a unique object" has

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[21] Andy Goldsworthy, "The Photograph," in *Hand to Earth: Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture, 1976-1990*, eds. Terry Friedman and Andy Goldsworthy (Leeds: Henry Moore Centre for the Study of Sculpture, 1990) 9.

[22] While some of Goldsworthy's works are constructed from stones and do not decay per se, they are acted upon by other natural forces.

[23] Steiner also alludes to this phenomenon of independence: "Artists, writers have borne vehement witness to the autonomies, to the resistant substantiation taken on by the figures they are painting or carving, by the characters they are creating." George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation: Originating in the Gifford Lectures for 1990*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 35.

[24] Pip Laurenson also observes a similar "conceptual dependency". She suggests that, because a materially focused ontology affects how "authenticity, change and loss" are perceived, changing the former will likewise alter the perception of the latter. Pip Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change, and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations," in *(Im)permanence: Cultures in/out of Time*, eds. Judith Schachter and Stephen Brockman (Pittsburgh, PA: Center for the Arts in Society / Carnegie Mellon University, 2008), 154.

[25] See Tschudi-Madsen's account of the debate: Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration*.

[26] Chris Caple, *Conservation Skills: Judgment, Method and Decision Making* (London: Routledge, 2000), 121, 40.

[27] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), 6-7.

traditionally been a primary concern for conservation in regards to authenticity, it no longer provides a tenable ontology for much contemporary art.[28] For instance, she argues that in "time-based media installation[s]", authenticity is located not within a static material identity but within what are considered its unique "work-defining properties";[29] these are the characteristics that must be preserved.[30] When the continuing existence of a work no longer depends on retaining the "original" manifestation, preservation practices similarly shift. Noting its contrast to Western conservation's usual modus operandi, Chris Caple identifies the Japanese practice of entirely and repeatedly re-making the physical structure of a temple as an approach that accomplishes preservation through a "retention of the spirit and the purpose" rather than the structure's original materiality.[31] However, as artist Bill Viola explains, it is a literal not metaphorical spirit ("the 'kami', the god"), which is transferred "to the new version, activating and empowering it."[32] (This stands in stark contrast to Ruskin's understanding of a building's relationship to its spirit; for him, the two are inextricably conjoined.) Viola suggests that the key to the shrine's longevity lies jointly in its continued use and the ritualized process of exact duplication from new materials, which is passed from one generation to the next.[33] Likewise, to ensure the continuity of his own video and digital media installations, which are vulnerable to both physical degradation and obsolete technology, Viola ritualizes the viewer's aesthetic experience so that the work's original, conceptual integrity will transcend any material alteration.[34] He cites Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's claim that "all works of art are modeled on invisible things" to support his conclusion that "the material objects are not the art" but are instead its manifestation.[35] Therefore, that which he views as essential to maintain is the ability to experience the "true inner life" of a work.[36] He notes that when the gallery is closed and his video installations are shut down, "No works of art are present, even in trace

[28] Laurenson, "Time-Based Media," 151. See also 152-53, 62. Her observations arise from an examination of "time-based media works of art" in particular. Ibid.,150.
[29] Ibid., 150, 58, 62-63.
[30] Ibid. 164.
[31] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 121.
[32] Bill Viola, "Permanent Impermanence," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 91.
[33] Ibid., 91-92.
[34] Ibid., 85, 87, 92.
[35] Ibid., 93.
[36] Ibid., 92, 94.

amounts. These pieces are not sleeping; they are dead."[37] These ontological conclusions about the nature of art directly affect Viola's preservation priorities. He states "It is about the active element latent in all objects—their life through use. It is precisely this that is most vital to preserve."[38] Thus, if the ability to experience the work as Viola intends is lost, then the work as a whole is also.

As even these few examples show, there is no clear consensus on the nature and boundaries of a work's existence, only intimations that it lies somewhere between materiality and immateriality; yet they also show that, regardless of ontological ambiguities, there exists a common concern for art's perdurance. However, expectations regarding aesthetic finitude have, like human finitude, varied widely throughout history.

THE MORTALITY OF ART

III. Aesthetic Finitude

Commenting in the sixteenth century on the anticipated loss of Renaissance enamels and glass, Vannoccio Biringuccio advised "Considering its brief and short life … it cannot and must not be given too much love, and it must be used and kept in mind as an example of the life of man and of the things of this world which, though beautiful, are transitory and frail."[39] Biringuccio, perhaps unsurprisingly for his era, assumed the nature of the world and its works to be one of perishability and transience. Yet, five centuries later (2003), Terry Draymann-Weisser notes that many Renaissance enamels "survive today in almost pristine condition."[40] Although her article recounts efforts to forestall the deterioration of one particular set of enamels, Biringuccio's statement is presented as a contrast to modern expectations.[41] Certainly, in this century and the last, the imminent or unalterable transience of created works has not necessarily been assumed as inevitable. Instead, art is generally regarded as enduring. For instance,

[37] Ibid., 88.
[38] Ibid., 94.
[39] Vannoccio Biringuccio, a "16th-century master craftsman and metalworker", as quoted in Terry Drayman-Weisser, "The Early Painted Enamels of Limoges in the Walters Art Museum: Historical Context and Observations of Past Treatments," objects issue, *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 42, no. 2 (Summer, 2003): 280, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180073.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

although a reinterpretation of its original meaning, the aphorism *ars longa, vita brevis* has sometimes been used to emphasize the contrast between the apparent "durability of art" and the fragility and brevity of human existence.[42] Lawrence Durrell alludes to this when he uses the phrase in his 1958 novel *Balthazar*: "The shapely hand on his shoulder still wore the great ring taken from the tomb of a Byzantine youth. Life is short, art long."[43] Indeed, the list of works of art whose perdurance has far superseded that of their creators appears at first glance to be a lengthy one: the Paleolithic Lascaux cave paintings, the Elgin Marbles, and the Mona Lisa are but a few familiar examples.[44] Even amongst works of modern art, this contrast in duration is still evident. For instance, a number of paintings by Jackson Pollock, who died tragically at the age of 44, have survived nearly double his number of years.[45] Robert Smithson's 1970 land art sculpture *Spiral Jetty*, although sometimes hidden from view, still exists today;[46] the artist, however, died in 1973. The "immortality" that works of art possess generally seems to exceed that of their creators; this is perhaps why art has been seen as a means of surrogate immortality. Unlike the life of the mortal artist, art appears to be remarkably enduring, which reinforces the perception of its immortality.

However, art historian Gary Schwartz asserts that the account of history actually tells quite the opposite tale. Instead, he claims, the evidence shows an abysmally low survival rate for art from the past (no more than ten percent in any category) and contradicts the pervasive but mistaken assumption that art is eternal or immortal.[47] Schwartz finds support for his view in the writings of Edward B.

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[42] "*Ars longa, vita brevis*" is derived from Seneca's writing. The original aphorism from Hippocrates concerned the length of time needed to learn the art of medicine in contrast to life's lesser allotment of years. In this second more recent meaning, art's power of endurance far exceeds that of the human. Simpson and Speake, eds., "Art is long and life is short."

[43] Lawrence Durrell, *Balthazar* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 234. Durrell's usage is cited as an example of the secondary meaning of "ars longa, vita brevis" in ibid.

[44] Admittedly, these enduring works are not necessarily in perfect or original condition: Alessandro Conti notes that at some point in its history columns in the *Mona Lisa*'s background were removed to accommodate classical aesthetics; although still visible in a copy of the painting, they are now "mutilated in the original." Alessandro Conti, *A History of the Restoration and Conservation of Works of Art*, trans. Helen Glanville (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007), 100-01.

[45] Tate. "Jackson Pollock: Artist Biography." Accessed April 7, 2014. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/jackson-pollock-1785. One of his surviving paintings, owned by the Tate, is more than 75 years old: Tate. "Jackson Pollack: Naked Man with Knife c. 1938-40." Accessed December 1, 2014, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/pollock-naked-man-with-knife-t03327.

[46] Doug Adams, *Transcendence with the Human Body in Art: George Segal, Stephen De Staebler, Jasper Johns, and Christo* (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 132.

[47] Gary Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art," *Art in America* (November 1996): 72.

Garrison, Gert van de Osten, and Andrew Stewart, which highlight significant gaps in the art historical record.[48] From Stewart he concludes, "Of the thousands of sculptures by hundreds of sculptors named in the ancient literature of art, only 24 firmly attributed pieces remain from a period of 700 years—one fragment per 30 years."[49] Additionally, he observes that of those works regarded by their Greek contemporaries as noteworthy, little to nothing remains:

> Of the paintings mentioned by ancient sources, not a single one survives. The only Greek paintings we have in any number, aside from stray scraps, are of two kinds: the decorations on mass-market pottery, sold in its time for a few obols and not dignified by Pliny with even a passing reference; and mosaics of which he mentions only one as a curiosity.[50]

Curator Ann Temkin suggests that museums also operate with collective myths about artistic endurance and immortality: namely, that an inventory number indicates permanence and "that works of art are fixed and immortal";[51] yet as she notes "an unsettlingly large percentage of numbered objects in our building [Philadelphia Museum of Art] do not exist as their numbers would indicate: they broke, were sold, are lost, or were designated for practical use and wore out. The assignment of a number does not, in truth, guarantee "'forever'".[52]

Moreover, Schwartz suggests that some of the supposedly enduring works still in our possession (such as Leonardo daVinci's *Last Supper*) may in reality be "more dead than alive"—victims of attempts to counter the effects of degradation and damage, which now render them virtually void of the artist's original hand.[53] Likewise, James Coddington agrees there are times when "over-restoration consigns […] authentic art, to oblivion".[54] In addition, when modern conservation ethics forbid the reparation of damage with overpaint, Coddington admits the only remaining option may be "declaring the work finished, dead."[55] A world in which humans are subject to bodily decrepitude and death equally renders works of art victims of material transience. Stephen Dykstra reminds us: "Eternally durable and changeless

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[48] Ibid., 72-73.
[49] Ibid., 73.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ann Temkin, "Strange Fruit," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 50.
[52] Ann Temkin, "Strange Fruit," In *The Conservation of Twentieth-Century Art: Two Case Studies*, Newsletter 13.2 (Summer 1998), Getty Conservation Institute, accessed May 3, 2013, http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/13_2/news1_1.html.
[53] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.
[54] James Coddington, "The Case Against Amnesia," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 23.
[55] Ibid., 22.

materials are unavailable to artists and conservators alike."[56] Yet, according to Schwartz, the system—with some exceptions—largely perpetuates a denial of these unassailable facts.[57] Therefore, he insists, that it is more reasonable to abandon the myth of immortality and advocates a recognition and acceptance of art's ineluctable mortality:[58]

> The natural condition of art is not to live but to perish—usually sooner, almost inevitably later. We deceive ourselves in claiming that art is an undying repository of memory, that it comes intact from the past, and that it is in our power to preserve it for posterity. Every generation sees the decay or destruction of far more art than it conserves. […] Destruction, not survival, is the norm.[59]

Suggesting instead that we draw upon Marcel Duchamp's proposal that art has a "limited lifespan", Schwartz concludes that we are in need of "a new *ars moriendi*, a respectful way of facing up to the mortality of art as well as to our own".[60]

This is not the first time a link has been drawn between human and artistic mortality. Both Zoe Leonard and Felix Gonzalez-Torres have created works of art in which loss is present both in the work and its meaning.[61] Created in response to a friend's death, the sewn together fruit peels in Leonard's *Strange Fruit (for David)* will eventually completely decay and disappear.[62] Gonzales-Torres' vanishing pile of candy (eaten by viewers as the artist intended) begins at the equivalent weight of the deceased person it represents.[63] In these instances, the artists have utilized transience to accomplish very personal aesthetic purposes. As Mary O'Neill argues, ephemeral works created within a culture of permanence are the means by which some artists address and embody their concerns and experiences of mourning:[64] "To the extent that the creation, acquisition, possession, and bequeathing of enduring works of art is an attempt to transcend the limits of our existence, ephemeral art engages with our fear

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[56] Steven W. Dykstra, "The Artist's Intentions and the Intentional Fallacy in Fine Arts Conservation," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 35, no. 3 (Autumn-Winter, 1996): 199, http://jstor.org/stable/3179782.

[57] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74. The exceptions Schwartz acknowledges are artists who use perishable media or intentionally shorten the life of their works.

[58] Ibid., 72, 74.

[59] Ibid., 72.

[60] Ibid., 75.

[61] For further insights into these and other works of mourning see Mary O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art: Mourning and Loss" (doctoral thesis, Loughborough University, 2007), Ethos.

[62] Temkin, "Strange Fruit," in Corzo, 45-47.

[63] Ibid., 47. Gonzales-Torres's work is additionally complex since, unlike Leonard's, its transience is perpetual: the candy is replenished so that viewer participation can continue.

[64] Mary O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art: Mourning and Loss," 88.

of mortality both in ourselves and in others. The fear of mortality involves not just the fear of death, but also the fear of the pain of mourning the loss of others."[65]

III. a. Physical, Cultural, and Aesthetic Factors Affecting the Endurance of Art

Will the work of art endure?

At the foundation of Schwartz's argument is the "survival of art" viewed primarily in material terms: Do we still have the (original) work today? As such, the mortality of art concerns a work's lack of physical perdurance. This is by no means the sole understanding of "the death of a work" but the others often depend, at least to some degree, upon materiality as well. For instance, Alessandro Conti recounts the eighteenth-century practice of using varnish to restore what Antonio Franchi described as "a painting which has 'died'"; this condition resulted from the significantly altered appearance of its original colors.[66] Physical degradation can, as Robert Storr acknowledges, lead "curators and conservators […to] declare an object irreparably damaged or 'dead,'[…]".[67] Additionally, material loss (along with a loss of critical cultural knowledge) can considerably impair a work's communicative ability, thereby preventing viewer access to the artist's intended meaning. Storr describes this as a state in which "what remains no longer conveys the meaning of the work in its original form."[68] Instead, he argues, for modern works in which the critical aesthetic trait of "newness" is impossible to preserve (such as Mondrian), direct "perceptual apprehension" of the work is lost and replaced with a lesser "conceptual one";[69] thus, what the artist intended for the work's original appearance can only be "'restor[ed]'" to the mind.[70] Similar observations by Conti are noted by Helen Glanville: according to Conti (and Venetian restorer Pietro Edwards before him), restoration that reflects "the cultural context and taste" of the restorer's era rather than

[65] Ibid., 89.
[66] Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, 171-72.
[67] Robert Storr, "Immortalité Provisoire," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 38.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 37.
[70] Ibid.

that of the artist, will result in the loss of the work's "original meaning, its power to move us through its material expression across the centuries as a living work".[71]

This survival is rendered even more complicated by the varied understandings of what "the work" is. Salvador Muñoz Viñas accuses the West of "material fetishism", whereby the material of which the *original* work is composed is perceived as more important than the clarity of continuing aesthetic communication. He observes: "most people still prefer to view the original object than a copy, regardless of its quality. […] for many people, the *authentic* material has a numinous quality […] that renders it very powerful in comparison with replicas and virtual experiences".[72] Laurenson notes that a work is still generally conceived in terms of "a unique physical object" in spite of two significant changes: "the dematerialization of the art object in the 1960's and the exploration of the idea of cultural objects as clusters of meanings".[73] Thus, the conundrum that Luper suggests complicates the delineation of life and death in humans—namely, how we should regard "what we *are*, and the conditions under which we persist"—likewise exists for art.[74] Moreover, since the watershed 1917 submission of Duchamp's readymade, *Fountain*, to the New York Society of Independent Artists, which challenged the definition of art, it has done so in increasing measure. As Laurenson notes, for some works of contemporary art, possession of an original material manifestation is not a central concern; such works are, like music, allographic rather than autographic in nature.[75] Accordingly, preservation involves the retention of a work's true identity rather than a particular material state.[76] These observations led Laurenson to suggest that the criterion of a work's "authenticity" is contingent on the primary orientation of "the ontological framework in which an object is classified".[77] For instance, "[i]f the ontological framework is focused on the material so will the notion of authenticity."[78] These issues are not dissimilar to those, which Davis chronicled, regarding resurrection and personal identity. What ensures continuity of person? What ensures continuity of the

[71] Helen Glanville, "Relativity and Restoration," in *A History of the Restoration and Conservation of Works of Art*, Alessandro Conti, trans. Helen Glanville (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007) xv, xxi.

[72] Salvador Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* (London: Routledge, 2011), 82-87.

[73] Laurenson, "Time-Based Media," 151.

[74] Steven Luper, "Death."

[75] Ibid., 151, 54, 62-63.

[76] Ibid., 162-64.

[77] Ibid., 154.

[78] Ibid.

artwork? If it is not a question of retaining the exact original materials, what is needed to ensure the work of art is not irretrievably lost?

Although ontological variances affect the *manner* of a work's conservation and need to be taken into account, whether a work endures is still broadly determined by three primary factors: material properties, valuation, and aesthetic intent.[79] A fourth, which may supersede the others at any time, might best be labeled "acts of God". "Will the work of art endure?" is, thus, far from a simple question. It can only be answered by understanding the complex web of "hazards" and "protections" these factors create, factors that both increase and decrease a work's chance of surviving. While each of these factors is critical from the moment of the work's inception, their determinative importance can wax or wane at any time during its life. In fact, what quickly becomes clear is the constant threat of extinction under which each work in actuality lives.[80]

III. a. i. Material Properties

What are the work's material properties?
How stable is the work?
Will it easily degrade?

The answers to these three questions critically affect a work's endurance.[81] Any works that are materially manifested are subject to those natural laws that govern their physical components. Outdoor sculptures of snow, ice, or leaves are at the mercy of the vicissitudes of weather. In curator Lance Fung's 2004 *The Snow Show* exhibition in Finnish Lapland, the natural effects of rising temperatures upon the media of snow and ice dictated the six-week duration of the large-scale sculptural installations.[82] Similarly, for Goldsworthy's color-graduated circle of yellow and orange maple leaves in Ouchiyama-Mura, Japan, his project notes record: "wind, sun", "leaves

[79] While Schwartz does not list these as such, his observations highlight each of these factors.
[80] This sense of *impending destruction held at bay* is especially noticeable in Caygill's essay on the survival and destruction of art. Howard Caygill, "The Destruction of Art," in *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics*, eds. Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Wilson (London: Tate, 2008).
[81] While I focus on materially manifested works of art in this section, similar issues affect performative or temporal works, especially when material means are called upon to preserve them.
[82] Lance Fung, ed., *The Snow Show* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 6-7.

drying out and blowing away".[83] Additionally, the integrity of a work's "canvas" provides a critical foundation for ensuring a work's permanence. Sandstone has proven a precarious long-term base for the "Rock Art of the San People" since ordinary exposure to the elements causes the surface of the stone to deteriorate and the paintings to be lost.[84] In 2012 the BBC reported the destruction of "[o]ne of the earliest works of art by the Turner Prize winning artist Douglas Gordon" by an act, not of vandalism, but of deliberate and intentional demolition;[85] the structure on which the commissioned mural, "Mute", had been painted had been deemed unsafe and condemned.[86] And in the 1970s, electric lighting and the breath of human visitors resulted in deteriorating conditions that threatened to destroy Lascaux's prehistoric cave paintings.[87]

Even when extrinsic threats are lessened, works of art are no less immune to material limitations. From the first brushstroke, chemical changes begin to affect the artist's choice of medium.[88] The immediacy of visible change varies widely but, as Dykstra notes, after twenty-five years it is generally no longer hidden.[89] He offers the striking example of the short-lived stability of "George Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* (1884-86, Art Institute of Chicago)", which "lost its initial luminous charm within five years. Its yellow, orange, and green pigments were quick to decay into more stable, less colorful chemical compounds."[90] Likewise, with stained glass, variations in its chemical composition directly bear on its degree of durability and, thus, longevity.[91] Medieval stained glass composed of Si–K–Ca has been found to degrade at a significantly greater rate than modern glass (Si–Na–Ca) under similar environmental conditions.[92] Deteriorating glass can lose "colour, transparency and

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[83] Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 71. As is true in this case, Goldsworthy's "private observations" become part of the "poetic titles of his photographs". Terry Friedman, "Monuments," in Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 143.

[84] L. Mol and H. A. Viles, "Geoelectric Investigations into Sandstone Moisture Regimes: Implications for Rock Weathering and the Deterioration of San Rock Art in the Golden Gate Reserve, South Africa," *Geomorphology* 118, no. 3 (2010): 280, doi:10.1016/j.geomorph.2010.01.008.

[85] BBC, "Turner Prize Winner's Douglas Gordon's mural destroyed," *BBC News*, last updated March 20, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-17452063.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 165.

[88] Dykstra, "Artist's Intentions," 199.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., 199-200.

[91] Lucile Gentaz, et al. "Early Stage of Weathering of Medieval-Like Potash-Lime Model Glass: Evaluation of Key Factors." *Environmental Science And Pollution Research International* 18, no. 2 (2011): 291, 296, 298-99, http://www.springerlink.com/content/701562171024785t/.

[92] Ibid., 296, 299.

even matter."[93] Such changes make a marked impact on the appearance of a work. However, in light of their inevitability, some artists take material changes into account, both anticipating and welcoming them as completers of their work.[94] For instance, Mildred Constantine notes that the cracks, which naturally formed in the drying clay of Goldsworthy's 1997 Getty sculpture, were "an effect desired by the artist."[95]

In contemporary art, experimentation with new materials has often yielded unforeseen problems, sometimes quite early in a work's life. During preparations for a twenty-five year retrospective, "video and electronic/digital media" artist Bill Viola was surprised to discover that some of his early work had "deteriorated beyond repair";[96] in addition, its analog format was no longer supported with the advent of the new digital technology.[97] In the case of Eva Hesse, her use of resin and latex predestined her works' inevitable degradation, which, although unintended, has already begun.[98] Artists who use new materials developed during their lifetime cannot necessarily predict their long-term durability. In 2007 Stephen Hackney discussed dramatic changes occurring to the Tate's collection of Naum Gabo's sculptures (made in the early part of the twentieth century) resulting from chemical degradation of the cellulose acetate from which they were constructed:[99] "Quite suddenly they have changed from being relatively intact sculptures to being unstable and unusable items. […] this degradation […] is catastrophic and once triggered will only get worse, like an explosion in very slow motion."[100] Hackney acknowledges that, although the process by which this degradation occurs is better understood, current knowledge may still be incomplete; therefore, potential treatment solutions risk creating new, hitherto unknown, preservation difficulties.[101] As Storr points out, even painter Robert

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[93] Ibid., 291.

[94] See artist expectations regarding "Time the Painter" in Conti, *Restoration and Conservation,*107-109.

[95] Mildred Constantine, "Preserving the Legacy of 20th-Century Art," Newsletter 13.2 (Summer 1998), Getty Conservation Institute, accessed May 3, 2013, http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/13_2/feature1.html.

[96] Viola, "Permanent Impermanence," 85, 87.

[97] Ibid., 87.

[98] Temkin, "Strange Fruit," in Corzo, 49; Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005) 25, 134.

[99] Stephen Hackney, "Degradation of Naum Gabo's Plastic Sculpture: The Catalyst for the Workshop," in *Tate Papers*, no. 8 (Autumn 2007), accessed December 5, 2014, http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/degradation-naum-gabos-plastic-sculpture-catalyst-workshop, 1.

[100] Ibid., 1-2.

[101] Ibid., 2.

Ryman's careful research into the nature of his materials cannot guarantee to overcome their limitations: "But the fact remains that even with this meticulous preparation and execution, the effects he is seeking are so subtle, and the work he consequently makes so inherently fragile, that a painting's actual chances of survival in the state in which he lets it go out into the world are, at best, unknown."[102]

Yet the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries have seen tremendous advances in science to which the conservation industry owes much of its present vitality and success. Paul Coremans suggests that these developments revolutionized the practice of restoration and made objective progress possible in the area of preservation.[103] When Caple explains the shift from the cleaning and repair of objects to the full-fledged conservation practices that we know today, he attributes this transformation, in part, to the increased scientific understanding of how to address decay.[104] In this age, there is greater potential to overcome material limitations in ways that previous generations would have found unimaginable. In 2006, Christie's sold one of Robert Gober's eight works entitled *Bag of Donuts*, which he created in 1989, for $240,000.[105] Although the fried pieces of dough were made in the usual way, Gober never intended his donuts to succumb to their ordinary organic fate;[106] instead, he wanted them to "'exist forever.'"[107] What would have been unthinkable even a century ago became possible in the hands of an expert conservator;[108] yet without his extensive intervention the donuts would never have made it to auction, and Gober's work would have been relegated to the rubbish bin and a few lines of descriptive text or an image in a book. When Mark Rothko's 1958 painting "Black on Maroon" was damaged by graffiti ink in 2012, detailed scientific analysis and careful testing by a team of Tate conservators allowed the work to be returned to "displayable

[102] Storr, "Immortalité Provisoire," 36.

[103] Paul Coremans, "Scientific Research and the Restoration of Paintings," trans. Barbara Harshav, in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, eds. Vaccaro, Talley Jr., and Price (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 433, 35.

[104] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 50, 55.

[105] Christie's, "Post War and Contemporary Art Afternoon Session: Sale 1727: Lot 396," accessed May 25, 2013, http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/robert-gober-bag-of-donuts-4816450-details.aspx?intObjectID=4816450.

[106] Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 145.

[107] As quoted in ibid.

[108] "Forever" was achieved by conservator Christian Scheidermann. Ibid., 145, 47.

condition" within 18 months.[109] Given the complexity of Rothko's methods and media this is indeed a remarkable feat.[110]

Yet in spite of such notable developments, the inevitability of material change and loss remains undeniable. Gober's donuts, while certainly possessing an usually long shelf life, are still many years away from achieving "forever"; moreover, conservators continue to face challenges that remain insurmountable. When Draymann-Weisser chronicles the history and treatment of the "actively deteriorating" early Limoges enamels from the Renaissance period, she does so from a position of "waiting" for science to provide a solution to arrest the incessant degradation.[111] While her expectation of an aesthetic reversal of fortune is implicit, it nonetheless remains unrealized. In the case of Constantin Brancusi's 1937 bronze sculpture, *Infinite Column*, lack of early maintenance combined with the environmental unsuitability of the artist's medium for his aesthetic intent, has left the monument in danger of succumbing to rust and corrosion; meanwhile, its original polished golden hue has all but vanished.[112] Furthermore, the editor of *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, Alessandra Melucco Vacarro, concludes that technology has, in fact, not delivered all that it seemed to promise:

> After a promising beginning, on balance, the concrete contributions of science, while shedding light on some areas, have left others in obscurity; the judgment is not totally positive, above all regarding the effect of new technologies applied to conservation in the last fifty years [since 1996].[113]
>
> Many of the predictions made by laboratories have not turned out as planned, especially in relation to the durability of the industrial products used in restoration and their subsequent alteration.[114]

Thus, in spite of increased knowledge, it is still material fragility that naturally ties a work to both transience and loss. While science has engendered new expectations, it has also affirmed matter's persistent limitations.[115] Material change is both a known

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[109] Tate, "Restored Rothko Returns to Tate Modern after Extensive Conservation Work," press release, May 13, 2014, accessed December 5 2014, http://www.tate.org.uk/about/press-office/press-releases/restored-rothko-returns-tate-modern-after-extensive-conservation.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Drayman-Weisser, "Early Painted Enamels," 280, 99, 300.

[112] David A. Scott, Vladimir Kucera and Bo Rendhal, "Infinite Columns and Finite Solutions," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 107, 09.

[113] Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro, "Introduction to Part VIII: The Role of Science and Technology," trans. Elizabeth Maggio, in Vaccaro, Talley Jr., and Price, *Cultural Heritage*, 426.

[114] Ibid., 427.

[115] In addition, scientific advances will have come too late for some works of art; hence, they will not exist in the future's collections. This is partly Schwartz's point about the past. We do not and

and inescapable reality. As Dkystra acknowledges, "The technical impossibility of stopping the deterioration of an artist's initial creation is clearly understood today."[116] Hence, the questions that introduced this section merely indicate the rapidity with which that process of decline will be evident. Although science has certainly increased the natural lifespans of works, it has not been able to eliminate the loss of works altogether. Even if its urgency is tempered by conservation developments, Birunguccio's admonition to consider the temporary life of art as a memento mori has nonetheless proven remarkably timeless. All that we can give a work, Storr suggests, is provisional immortality ["immortalité provisoire"]—that is, "to extend the life of objects a little".[117] Mortality is, for both art and humans, a persistent suitor who eventually succeeds in his quest.

III. a. i. 1. The Pursuit of Permanence

Nevertheless, as Schwartz, O'Neill and others have noted, it is the pursuit of aesthetic permanence or immortality that has formed the dominant cultural ethos and practice for art in the western world. Writing at the end of the twentieth century about conservation difficulties with Brancusi's *Infinite Column*, David A. Scott, Vladimir Kucera, and Bo Rendahl state: "Most of us would not be happy to allow this work to rust away in a Ruskin-like acceptance of the death of the artwork, leaving us only with its legend."[118] For this reason, they earnestly labor in pursuit of that which has, thus far, eluded them. While they expect most to share their perspective, their reference to Ruskin underscores just how historically and culturally relative attitudes toward aesthetic permanence actually are. A more recent (2013) BBC news article, "Salisbury Cathedral Sand Art to Be Destroyed", also takes for granted a bias toward permanence;[119] this cultural presumption is only revealed as the article unfolds. The title provokes the reader's interest by playing off her assumption that art—as something of value—should be preserved, not destroyed.[120] (Of course the cathedral setting may also heighten her sense of concern by calling to mind images of

cannot possess a full record of all that has been made because loss has been and will be far more prevalent that many admit: they regard it as the surmountable exception rather than the rule.

[116] Dykstra, "Artist's Intentions," 200.

[117] Storr, "Immortalité Provisoire," 40.

[118] Scott, Kucera, and Rendhal, "Infinite Columns," 110.

[119] BBC, "Salisbury Cathedral Sand Art to Be Destroyed," *BBC News*, October 3, 2013. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-24383615.

[120] Ibid.

iconoclastic destruction.) In this instance, however, the work of art in question is a Buddhist sand mandala, whose intricate and time-consuming construction as well as subsequent dismantling form part of a religious ritual enacted by Tibetan monks.[121] As the article reports, the mandala's destruction equally serves "to emphasise the 'transitory nature of material life'."[122] Hence, impermanence is not seen as an aberration or something to be resisted, but as a restatement of the nature of reality as perceived by the monks. Moreover, the BBC's use of "destroyed"—a word with strong negative connotations—simply reinforces Western assumptions, whereas, in actuality, "dismantled" is more accurate.[123] The ritualized dismantling process includes the ceremonial dismissal of the deities who inhabit the mandala before the "consecrated sand" is collected and poured into a nearby body of water;[124] this intentional dispersal is believed to allow the mandala's spiritual benefits to extend more widely.[125] Transience thus performs a specific and accepted function within the Buddhist framework; viewed from within this context impermanence hardly qualifies as unusual or noteworthy. However, the article's approach is effective because both deliberate destruction and resigned acceptance of artistic impermanence are still perceived as striking cultural anomalies in the West.[126]

Indeed, Barry Bryant (who was responsible for bring this ritual art form to several cultural institutions in the United States in the 1980s) repeatedly observed a similar clash of cultural expectations whenever the sand mandala's construction reached completion:[127]

> Significantly, each time the mandala was swept up, regardless of how methodically or ritualistically this was done, Western onlookers reacted strongly, in many cases with great emotion. Many viewed the act not as a dismantling but rather as a destruction. What transpired was most unexpected, almost inconceivable, to the mind-set of our culture, which places such value on possession. The lesson we came away with—some of us less with the

[121] Ibid.; Barry Bryant, *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala: Visual Scripture of Tibetan Buddhism*, in cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2003), 20-21, 33, 228-29.

[122] BBC, "Salisbury Cathedral."

[123] Ibid.; Bryant, *Wheel of Time*, 251.

[124] Ibid., 228-29.

[125] Ibid., 229; BBC, "Salisbury Cathedral."

[126] Indeed, the power of museum director Antonio Manfred's 2012 "Art War"—in which works of art were burned in protest of the Italian government's funding cuts for cultural institutions—depends upon a sense of shock or outrage at the destruction of art. See BBC, "Italian Museum Burns Artworks in Protest at Cuts," *BBC News*, last updated April 20, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-17754129.

[127] Bryant, *Wheel of Time*, 5.

> wisdom of understanding, perhaps, than with the shock of disbelief—was the Buddhist view of the impermanence of all phenomena.[128]

The monks underlined the contrast: "'Just as foreign as it is to you to think of not preserving the sand mandala, so it is equally unthinkable to us to keep it. The best way of preserving this tradition is to dismantle it and come again to make another one.'"[129] Although a practitioner of Buddhism, Bryant himself was not entirely immune to the Western penchant for holding onto that which one values.[130] Influenced by a desire to make the mandala available to a greater number of persons for study and contemplation, he joined with museum professionals on a quest to discover a means by which to preserve it, "experiment[ing] with sprays and other protective coating techniques" before finally adopting the traditional ritual dispersal.[131] Yet, as Bryant later affirmed, impermanence is the only logical option when one understands the mandala's aim:

> The idea of possessing any of the ritual arts, and holding on to either their form or the accomplishment derived from them, defeats the purpose. Rather, the emphasis is placed on perfecting the mind of the practitioner, who generates in himself or herself the body, speech, mind, and wisdom consciousness of the deity. With this as the objective, the idea of permanence in ritual art is as inconceivable as not wanting happiness.[132]

Bryant makes a critical observation: there may be other aims that necessitate a work's transience.

In the last six decades new types of artworks have been introduced to the Western aesthetic tradition: works which are not made to last, such as auto-destructive art and works made using perishable materials. These ephemeral works call attention to impermanence within an aesthetic culture steeped in permanence. Hence, even when transience and decay or loss are integral to the artist's aesthetic vision for her work, material ephemerality often finds itself at odds with longstanding institutional norms, especially when agencies of acquisition, such as museums and collectors, are involved. Temkin noticed the consternation caused by the Philadelphia Museum of Art's acquisition of Leonard's *Strange Fruit (for David)*, a work whose fruit skin medium destined it for decay apart from extreme intervention: a solution that Leonard

[128] Ibid., 251.
[129] Ibid., 251-52.
[130] Ibid., 35.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid., 252-53.

ultimately rejected as antithetical to the work's meaning.[133] Some of Temkin's colleagues expressed discomfort with the purchase "because of the implied obligations of storage and conservation" and the paradox of assigning "an acquisition number […] to something that [would not] always be there".[134] Reflecting on this, Temkin mused, "In a museum, it often seems […] we are dedicated to preserving the fiction that works of art are fixed and immortal."[135] Yet, noting the irony, she observed that the museum's limestone building—"constructed in the timeless idiom of the classical temple"—was itself showing significant signs of degradation.[136]

O'Neill suggests this drive for permanence is fueled by a number of strong cultural and practical pressures including the following: museums and collectors require conservable and transferable objects; artists need a saleable object; and posthumous artistic reputations are built upon a significant quantity of enduring works.[137] These pragmatic and institutional concerns are woven into the operational fabric of the cultural system in which art is located.[138] Furthermore, according to sociologist Michael Thompson's analysis of our cultural valuation and treatment of objects in *Rubbish Theory*, the expectation of permanence is a natural byproduct of the classification of art as a durable object: something that increases in value and possesses an infinite lifespan.[139] Once it is categorized as durable, art must abide by the standards that define it.[140] He writes:

> Art works, particularly paintings, with their flimsy canvas, worm-eaten stretchers, and fading pigments, are often at risk and a whole industry of conservation has been called into existence to counter this tendency by forcing these objects to exhibit the physical properties appropriate to the category in which they find themselves.[141]

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[133] She made this decision after a means of preservation was achieved for twenty-five pieces. Temkin, "Strange Fruit," in Corzo, 47.

[134] Temkin, "Strange Fruit," in *Conservation*.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

[137] O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art," 88-89.

[138] For instance, it was Leonard's dealer who initially prompted her to seek the extreme preservation of her work. Temkin, "Strange Fruit," in Corzo, 46-47.

[139] Thompson divides objects into three categories: rubbish, transient, and durable, and describes the process by which objects can shift categorically. Transient objects are those whose value and lifespan decreases over time. Durable objects do the reverse, with increasing value and an unlimited lifespan, while rubbish is without value. Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 7,9-10, 103-04.

[140] Ibid., 105.

[141] Ibid.

Of course, as Thompson acknowledges, actual infinite durability is in fact impossible: "no physical object can last forever".[142] Therefore, in a conceptual sleight of hand, the requirement of perdurance is shifted to "just long enough" and emphasis placed on the duty to save things for future generations.[143]

> As long as the majority of the items in the durable category survive the lifetime of the individual culture-bearers, and, more important, as long as during this time people act towards those objects *as if* they were going to last for ever, then the category boundary is unthreatened. In everyday human, rather than cosmic, terms the infinite life-span of durables is translated into the familiar sacred stewardship. […] pass on our durables to the next generation in the condition in which we should like to find them.[144]

Yet, as Thompson observes, even these valiant efforts can be thwarted.[145] When the limitations of the material world take effect, and durable objects are suddenly rendered non-existent, the response is usually one of protest: "sorrow, outrage, letters to the newspapers, and contributions to charitable funds to prevent the same sort of thing from happening again."[146] The delicate cultural order maintained in such categories (transient and durable) has been upset and must be put right again.[147]

As Thompson's and O'Neill's observations suggest, it is material instability set against this backdrop of expectations and pragmatic concerns that prompts the question: *Can these limitations be overcome?* Indeed, while art practices in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have increasingly challenged the permanence aesthetic and its demand for preservation, there nonetheless remains a persistent bent toward subverting a work's natural limitations in some way, if only to ensure that future generations will have the possibility of continued engagement with the work. In fact, as Caple notes (two decades after Thompson), "[m]uch of the present emphasis in conservation is on preservation for posterity, ensuring that the remains of the past will be available to future generations for study."[148] This concern is echoed by Barry Munitz (of The J. Paul Getty Trust) and reflects this sense of "sacred stewardship" over the products of human creativity:

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[142] Ibid., 104.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 104-05.
[148] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 203.

> Those of us living now are responsible not only for caring for works that have been passed to us by previous peoples and generations but also for preserving the legacy of the art of today.[149]

Of course, as Scheffler observed, these activities are only made meaningful by the existence of a collective afterlife, the assumption of which is evident here.

As Thompson noted, it is the conservation industry that operates as one of the most powerful weapons levied against material limitations. Its raison d'être is often expressed in terms that underscore preservation as crucial and the only "logical" response to decay and degradation. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) uses vivid and dramatic language to convey what it perceives to be the urgency and significance of this work:

> Every day, the vision of artists, the identity of peoples, and the very existence of history all threaten to disappear. Left alone, old buildings will crumble. The Declaration of Independence will disintegrate. The photographed faces of battle-weary Civil War soldiers will fade away...
>
> Preserving this cultural material is of paramount importance, but it still presents complex challenges to our society. Conservation professionals are those who embrace these challenges with passion, commitment and dedication. By melding art with science, conservation professionals protect our heritage, preserve our legacy, and ultimately, save our treasures for generations to come.[150]

In the UK, ICON (The Institute of Conservation) aims to "achieve the long term preservation and conservation" of "our precious cultural heritage".[151] While comparative linguistic restraint marks ICON's expression of its goal, both projects presuppose a relationship between something's value and its permanence, which provides the driving motivation for their labors. For its part, the Los Angeles-based Getty Conservation Institute focuses on "the visual arts, broadly interpreted" but it intends to influence and resource the wider international community: that is, those tasked with conserving the world's cultural heritage.[152] Clearly, overturning material transience is deemed worthy of a concerted global effort. The fear of irreversible loss

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[149] Barry Munitz, foreword to Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, vii.

[150] American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, "About Conservation: What is Conservation?," accessed May 18, 2016, http://www.conservation-us.org/about-conservation#.VzxhZJMrKCQ.

[151] The Institute of Conservation, "About ICON," accessed October 18, 2013, http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=2 (page no longer available).

[152] The Getty Conservation Institute, "Mission and Values," accessed October 18, 2013, http://www.getty.edu/conservation/about/mission.html.

and anticipation of its devastating consequences are persistent subtexts within these institutes' (and other similar bodies') expressed aims. In practice, however, concern for the future of a work often limits the experience of it in the present.

Aesthetic finitude, therefore, garners widespread attention and great effort is expended to counter it. However, the elimination of known causes of transience is not always feasible and, as a result, the original manifestation of the work is lost. When this happens, alternative forms of permanence are often called upon to mitigate the loss.

III. a. i. 2. Alternative Permanence

Given their considerable size and propensity to melt in the fluctuating temperature of an outdoor environment, Lance Fung's *The Snow Show* sculptures would have required an impossibly large exterior freezer, making them unlikely candidates even for extreme forms of preservation; nor, in fact, were any considered.[153] Size and location are often naturally limiting factors to permanence. As Margaret Hedstrom and Anna Perricci note, "a site-specific installation references its physical location, which both gives the work an additional layer of meaning and a relatively short life span by default."[154] Thus, while they are intended to be of short duration, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's installations are also practically ephemeral:[155] whether the artists use fabric to wrap the German Reichstag or 1.5 miles of the Australian coast, buildings or public spaces can only be temporarily borrowed.[156] The inevitability of limited temporal existence is already a familiar issue for works that involve any degree of performance. Consequently, the retention of theatre and dance performances has hitherto been the focus of much debate and concern.[157] "Happenings"—singular

[153] Instead, the "design brief" for the artist and architect pairings was to create works in snow and ice with the full knowledge that they would disappear. Fung notes how challenging this was for those (architects) used to working toward the creation of something permanent.
Fung, *The Snow Show*, 7.

[154] Margaret Hedstrom and Anna Perricci, "It's Only Temporary," in Schachter and Brockman, *(Im)permanence*, 27.

[155] The artists set the duration of their project's display to correspond with their aesthetic aims.

[156] Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Life and Work," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed August 27, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/life-and-work; see similar observation in Sally Yard, *Christo: Oceanfront*, photographs by Gianfranco Gorgoni (Princeton, NJ: The Art Museum Princeton University, 1975), 17-18.

[157] See Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230598560, 21-25.

ephemeral works involving performance—brought similar issues of impermanence and unrepeatability further into the realm of the visual arts.[158]

In such cases, artists or others cannot reasonably expect to preserve the work as it was originally manifested. Therefore, if the work's perdurance is desired, they must rely upon alternative forms of preservation. As we have already noted, this introduces complex ontological issues regarding the work's identity. Nevertheless, when the question "*Can these limitations be overcome?*" is answered negatively, surrogate forms of existence are often utilized to bestow a kind of immortality or continuing presence to the work. These may include some form of documentation (descriptive texts, photographs, or recordings: film, video, and audio; digital recreation), the remaking of the work using identical but new materials, or the translation of the work into a different but more stable format.[159] Moreover, memory is also called upon to "preserve" the work.

The Tate's response to the potentially irreversible deterioration of works by Gabo evidences both the unwillingness to allow loss to be the final word and this orientation toward alternative solutions:

> Currently, we are attempting to record the sculpture in as much detail as possible and restricting their display.
>
> If these important works are to be lost or to become unexhibitable, we need to find ways of interpreting them for future audiences.[160]

Likewise, the documentary text and photographs of *The Snow Show*'s exhibition catalogue are offered as a perpetuation of the presence of each ephemeral installation. Fung writes "The projects, although now melted away, still remain firmly etched in the memories of the fortunate few who personally experienced the show; though through this book we hope to bring the wonder and beauty of 'The Snow Show' to

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[158] Glimcher asserts: "The Happenings disappeared after they were performed, and only those who saw them really understood the experience." Remarking on the lack of documentation that adequately captures a sense of the event, Glimcher also notes: "Allan Kaprow did not want the Happenings preserved. They were meant to be fleeting and non-repeatable, like life." However, some artists did repeat them. Given the absence of "plot", their initial setting of galleries, and their origination by artists, Mildred L. Glimcher argues for their primary inclusion with "visual culture" rather than "traditional theater". Mildred Glimcher, *Happenings: New York, 1958-1963*, and Photography by Robert R. McElroy (New York: Monacelli, 2012), 8,11.

[159] For example, Gober instructed some elements of his works could be substituted if they should degrade: the custom made bag in *Bag of Donuts* or the white enamel paint that covers his sinks. Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 147, 49. The latter method is often used for film and video media.

[160] Hackney, "Naum Gabo's," 493

you all."[161] Mary Jane Jacobs adds "it is not only an exhibition catalogue but also an actual experience, proving that the artists' and architects' ideas have not completely evaporated."[162] Clearly, much is expected from this surrogate existence. Documentation may perform this function for both temporary and permanent works. As Hedstrom and Perricci observe, "The purpose of these surrogates is to increase access to representations of art and to enable 'time-shifting' in viewing and consumption."[163] Indeed, for many artists, documentation will be the sole means by which others know their works. For example, Goldsworthy systematically photographs his ephemeral works and it is through these two-dimensional records (in books and gallery exhibitions) that most "encounter" his art.[164] Yet, like the works they document, these photographs also require preservation. Following the millennium, a collaborative project between Goldsworthy and others sought to catalogue and digitally preserve the artist's slides taken between 1976 and 1986.[165] While most were substantially intact, loss or damage to some slides was found to have already occurred; a few slides were either "missing" or degraded by "dirt", "handling", or "fading".[166]

In other instances of aesthetic finitude, works are simply replicated as a form of preservation. Martha Buskirk suggests it was conceptual art's redefinition of the relationship between "the work" and "the object" that opened the way for the practice of remaking as a middle-ground alternative to extreme responses to material instability.[167] For example, both *Gnaw* and *Lick and Lather*—works created by Janine Antoni in lard, chocolate, and soap—have been remade either by repeating the original methods or recasting the original without requiring Antoni's further involvement: Antoni licked new chocolate busts to replace those which had suffered aesthetically compromising damage, but the gnawed lard-objects were simply recast

[161] Fung, *The Snow Show*, 11.

[162] Mary Jane Jacobs, "Musing on the Place of Art," in *The Snow Show,* ed. Lance Fung (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 4.

[163] Hedstrom and Perricci, "It's Only Temporary," 32-33.

[164] Andy Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy* (London: Viking, 1990), n.p.

[165] University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, "About the Project," *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976-1986*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/about/.

[166] University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, "About the Catalogue," *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976-1986*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/.

[167] Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 149. She names these as "extravagant preservation steps or planned decay".

from their finished forms.[168] Viola, whose work has been affected by both material and technological change, observes, "that the key to survival seems to lie with an endless cycle of reproduction—copying as conservation."[169] Indeed, the Tate's time-based media conservation practices for video involve the use of continual replication, thus, taking advantage of the stability of the latest technological developments while striving to maintain the original integrity of the work. They include the creation of

> a preservation master on a non-compressed component video format. This provides a clear path for future migration of material and a stable professional format with reliable playback. These masters are then migrated every five years onto new stock and, in all likelihood, onto new formats. The goal is to minimise changes to the look and feel of the original.[170]

Again, we see the issue Davis raised regarding criteria for the continuity of identity in resurrected human persons return in its aesthetic form, as replication methods set their criteria for genuineness; in these cases it may be that the artwork's "closest continuer" is considered wholly acceptable.

Digital recreation is the most recent form of alternative preservation to be hailed as the new savior for vulnerable works. Popular news media has again taken note of this latest use of new technology, which allows 3D virtual reproductions of fragile works to be used for research as well as public exhibition. *New Scientist* heralds one such preservation attempt along the Scottish coast as "Digitising cave art will prevent it being lost forever".[171] The Xiangtangshan Caves Project (China), based at the University of Chicago, is also using digital reconstruction to reinstate losses caused by environmental damage and previous looting of the Buddhist shrines' sculptures and carvings.[172] The 2010-2013 exhibition "Echoes of the Past: the Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan," juxtaposed preserved fragments of sculptures from various museums and the digitally recreated caves to provide a reintegrated context that viewers could then explore virtually.[173] However, when Dr. Katherine Tsiang, Xiangtangshan Project Coordinator, commented for the *New*

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[168] Ibid., 142. As Buskirk notes, not all aging of the medium was considered problematic.

[169] Viola, "Permanent Impermanence," 87, 90-91.

[170] Tate, "Conservation – Time-Based Media," accessed May 19, 2014, http://www.tate.org.uk/about/our-work/conservation/time-based-media.

[171] Aviva Rutkin, "Digitising Cave Art Will Prevent It Being Lost Forever," *New Scientist*, no. 2964, April 11, 2014, accessed April 11, 2014, http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22229644.500-digitising-cave-art-will-prevent-it-being-lost-forever.html#.U0fs2eZdWbD.

[172] Center for the Art of East Asia, "Home," *Xiangtangshan Caves Project*, accessed December 13, 2104, http://xts.uchicago.edu/.

[173] Ibid., "Exhibitions," *Xiangtangshan Caves Project*, accessed December 13, 2104, http://xts.uchicago.edu/content/exhibitions.

Scientist article on digitizing rock art in Scotland, she pointed out that preservation issues follow even this newest solution. *New Scientist* states "But she [Tsiang] cautions that even high-tech archives are vulnerable to becoming outdated, or simply forgotten about. 'All of this digital stuff isn't permanent unless it's carefully maintained,' she says."[174] ICON's recommendations regarding "Caring for our Collections" to the UK House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee include a similar reminder:

> Digitisation is often cited as a means of opening up collections and making them accessible. Whilst this is true, it should not be forgotten that digital preservation has its own set of problems and that any access strategy incorporating digitisation also needs to cover digital preservation.[175]

Lest we think that responding to material transience by alternative forms of preservation is solely a contemporary phenomenon, it is worth noting that, according to Alessandro Conti, early modern practice included both making copies of and writing about a work as means by which to extend its remembrance.[176] He recounts the renowned George Vasari's use of both for fragile or already degraded works: he made copies of works by Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci and wrote extensive descriptions of the lost churches and art of Arezzo, which were casualties of Medici building projects.[177] These were, undoubtedly, the best methods of alternative preservation available at the time and provided a means by which works were not allowed to succumb to transience and disappear entirely.[178]

III. a. i. 3. The Expectation of Finitude

Although Schwartz and others have questioned the degree to which the material limitations of art are acknowledged and accepted, there are some who readily take

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[174] Rutkin, Digitising Cave Art."

[175] See section 6.2: The Institute of Conservation, "Submission to the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee: Caring for Our Collections," accessed December 18, 2014, http://www.icon.org.uk/images/stories/downloads/cms_careofcollectionssep06.pdf (page no longer available).

[176] Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, 39.

[177] Ibid.

[178] These methods are still in use today. For example, Viola's installation *The Stopping Mind* utilizes exhibition copies, while the original is archived. Viola, "Permanent Impermanence," 87. Mildred Glimcher's extensive text on Happenings follows Vasari in kind as a historian's attempt "to archive and preserve the past life of [ephemeral] 'event based art.'" Glimcher, *Happenings*, 8,9. Moreover, Caple advises replicating objects when severe material instability renders preservation impossible. Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 13.

note of these and conclude, like Biringuccio in the sixteenth century, that transience is not an aberration but something to be expected. For example, Thierry de Duve holds this view. He states:

> Works of art are objects, and even with the best conservation techniques, objects ultimately succumb to the law of entropy. Though not made to be destroyed, works of art are made in full awareness that they will not last forever.[179]

Howard Caygill argues that within the very efforts of preservation lies an implicit attestation to art's inherent finitude:[180] conservation acknowledges that a work, by its nature, requires care to remain in existence.[181] Viewed in this way, artworks are "always on the verge of destruction"[182] and survival is the anomaly.[183] For this reason Schwartz lambasts UNESCO, the Getty Conservation Institute, and others for perpetuating the myth of permanence as they "develop strategies for shoring up the crumbling ruin of world art."[184] He asserts:

> they assume that works of art are entitled to live on indefinitely—that threats to their continued existence are undesired and correctable aberrations. As we have seen this attitude is unrealistic. All art is dying, whether rapidly or slowly, and all we can do is to protract the process for a minuscule and idiosyncratically chosen number of works."[185]

Similarly, Christo maintained that we have failed to acknowledge that our so-called permanent collections are already filled with works long past their prime: "'In a way, we are surrounded by ruin and debris in our museums, and we try to pretend that they are art.'"[186]

While they utilize different terminology, both Caygill and Schwartz focus not only on the terminus of art but also on the dynamic process by which the work arrives at that end: during the work's progression toward death, its life is only prolonged or sustained through intentional care. Schwartz characterizes art as "dying", which implies an actively declining state. Caygill uses the term "destruction", which he

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[179] Thierry de Duve, "Response to Howard Caygill," in Costello and Wilson, *Life and Death of Images*, 176-77.

[180] Caygill, "Destruction of Art," 163.

[181] Ibid., 165-67.

[182] Ibid., 167.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.

[185] Ibid.

[186] As quoted in Burt Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: A Biography*, with epilogue by Wolfgang Volz (New York: St Martin's, 2000), 82.

defines as "passing out of existence";[187] yet his language suggests there is a loss of vitality rather than merely material absence. This shift from a fixed materiality to a dynamic reality ("works of art are […] already and always undergoing destruction")[188] brings temporality to the fore by emphasizing "when" over "what".[189] Because he views the work's existence as caught "between creation and destruction", Caygill argues that a work of art might be better understood as "an event rather than an object."[190] While De Duve disputes Caygill's claim that "art is made to be destroyed", it is a fitting description for some works of art, namely those that are intentionally transient.[191] These works may possess a specific date of termination and, thus, never endure a protracted and eventual physical demise. For example, the "1300 nurses' blouses" which composed Sheila Hicks' 1977 installation in Lausanne, Switzerland were returned to their original use after the work was disassembled.[192] As Hicks describes it, "they were art for three months."[193] In this instance destruction took two forms: material dismantling and de-signification, the phrase "were art" signaling their time of existence in one state before reverting to another.

Moreover, modern and contemporary art presents some of the greatest challenges for traditional conservation practices and the broader pursuit of permanence. Muñoz Viñas lists two factors that are notable in this regard: "performativity" and "intangibility".[194] Some works intentionally incorporate "chemical, biological, or physical" processes as part of the work.[195] In these instances, "permanence may be disregarded as non-relevant or undesirable" since change is intrinsic to the work.[196] In other works, "the creative process or the creative idea" may be more important to the artist than the physical product;[197] yet a "pure idea" or an "intangible notion" is impossible for a conservator to preserve.[198] Works of intrinsic or intentional ephemerality, as well as those that are time or performance-based,

[187] Caygill, "Destruction of Art," 163.
[188] Ibid.
[189] See ibid., 169. Caygill suggests the critical question is "when" not "what" is the work.
[190] Ibid.
[191] de Duve, "Response to Howard Caygill," 174-78.
[192] Sheila Hicks, "Linen Longevity," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 141-42.
[193] Ibid., 144.
[194] Salvador Muños Viñas, "The Artwork That Became a Symbol of Itself: Reflections on the Conservation of Modern Art," in *Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art: Reflections on the Roots and the Perspectives*, edited by Ursula Schädler-Saub and Angela Weyer. London: Archetype, 2010, 15.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.

introduce additional difficulties.[199] The work as "event" means that there is often no "static" object to preserve. This inherent limitation is readily apparent in the preservation of works of performance art, which sometimes involve unrepeatable, singular interactions with viewers. Documentation is the usual alternative solution. However, as Buskirk notes, because duration is a critical component in such works, our knowledge of them may be both limited and shaped by their documentation.[200] How much of "the work" is lost in the process, and how much is retained? The iconic images depicting Beuys and a coyote in *Coyote, I Like America and America Likes Me* represent select times of interaction between the two: "capturing a few moments in a multiday action during which, for much of the time, the coyote slept off to the side."[201] Therefore, Buskirk suggests that different forms of documentation can significantly alter the sense of the work itself: for example, three sets of documentation for Chris Burden's *Shoot* convey a strikingly varied experience of the passage of time: one, the shot in a single photograph; another a seemingly lengthy series of photographed moments depicting aim to post-shot; and the other a film "where the action is over almost as soon as it starts."[202]

Awareness of temporal and material factors may open the door to reconsidering the role and value of transience and temporality both in the work of art and in human experience. While the explicit recognition of aesthetic finitude has become more common, tensions regarding a work's permanence still exist—primarily as a result of differing valuations.

III. a. ii. Valuation

Who has interest in this work remaining?
Who considers this worthy of preservation?
Are the means available to achieve this?

While material properties play a key role in a work's perdurance, a work of art also survives because someone wants it to. Caygill highlights the significance of

[199] Intrinsic: resulting from the artist's conscious use of particularly unstable or perishable media.
[200] See Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 219-20.
[201] Ibid., 219.
[202] Ibid.

intentionality in prolonging this existence: "'we have works of art because they have not been allowed to succumb to destruction'."[203] In other words, the continuing existence of a work indicates positive interference by some outside vested interest.[204] Or, as artist David Hockney more poetically describes, "'It is love […] that makes us pick the things that will last—that's all. It might start with an individual. It might start with a group of people. But without love, the object wouldn't be there. Love will decide what is kept, and science will decide how it is kept.'"[205]

If permanence begins with an artist's decision not to destroy his or her work, it only continues when others consider the work equally worthy of preservation.[206] Munitz aptly describes the passing of this baton of responsibility:

> The creation of a work of art is only the beginning of its life. From then on, it changes. It may pass though different hands: from artist to dealer to collector to curator to conservator. How and why the work is sustained or maintained is up to all who come in contact with it.[207]

He also notes that only the "living" can preserve the works of "previous peoples and generations";[208] otherwise, mortality engulfs them both. Once the artist can no longer play an active part in ensuring a work's existence, it is others who must do so. Coomoroswamy clearly recognized this when, in 1943, he defined the primary role of art museums as one of protection:[209] "to take care of ancient or unique works of art which are no longer in their original places or are no longer used as was originally intended, and are therefore in danger of destruction by neglect or otherwise."[210] As a result, some artists will themselves seek to provide for the future needs of their works. O'Neill recounts artist Gonzales-Torres' efforts to ensure audiences could continue to interact with his works following his death, including replenishing the candies or

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[203] Caygill, "Destruction of Art," 167.

[204] There are exceptions to this general principle. A work could simply have been lost or forgotten and in those conditions been able to survive. Schwartz suggests that the "ignorance and indifference" of subsequent generations allowed numerous works of Egyptian art to remain safely preserved in burial. Yet, now that they have been brought to light, ordinary preservation considerations are critical. Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 75.

[205] In Mildred Constantine, "Preserving the Legacy."

[206] I use the term "preservation" in its broadest sense to include not only the simple act of not discarding or destroying something but also the more involved actions of conservation. The practice of painting over previously used canvases also demonstrates these valuation choices. Even the artist's process of arriving at the desired final work can involve the destruction of previous attempts.

[207] Munitz, foreword to Corzo, vii.

[208] Ibid.

[209] He derives a museum's function from that of "Curator". Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (New York: Dover, 1956) 7.

[210] Ibid.

sheets of paper which the viewers were instructed to take.[211] However, even with advance planning, the survival of the work remains dependent on the ongoing compliance of others, as well as the continuing means to achieve it. As Temkin astutely asks regarding a critical component of one of Gonzalez-Torres's works, "the candies won't be made forever. Should the museum purchase what seems like a ten-year supply? Fifty-year supply? Hundred-year supply?"[212] For any work, a consideration of both institutional capacity and long-term value will enter into the preservation equation: For how long should one seek to maintain a work and why?

An object's perceived value is thus both reflected in and determinative of its perdurance. As Vaccaro observes, "an object that survives from the past and comes down to the present, and that escapes the laws of destruction and annihilation, must always have had a demonstrable value."[213] If the work has little or no perceived value then it will simply abide by its natural tendencies toward decay or be destroyed. The rise and fall of the popularity of etchings, as chronicled by Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, provides a clear instance of these forces at work. Following the Great Depression and World War II,

> Once-coveted prints, greatly diminished in value, were stored away in attics and basements to become victims of worms, mice, mildew, and general neglect. Some acquired for speculative purposes were destroyed along with other now-worthless stock certificates.[214]

The history of the Chippendale chair, which Thompson recounts, reflects this process in reverse. Its present "often battered state" is a reflection of its humble beginnings as the cast-off of the Victorian salon.[215] The chairs were once relegated to "servant's attics" but have been given a new lease on life as a result of a rediscovered aesthetic appreciation.[216] This is the process that Thompson's *Rubbish Theory* describes: a change in valuation transforms an object's fate.[217] Likewise, as Jean Clottes observed, in order for rock art outside the European continent to gain the level of interest that

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[211] O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art," 94.

[212] Temkin, "Strange Fruit," in Corzo, 48.

[213] Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro, "Introduction to Part III: The Emergence of Modern Conservation History," trans. Alexandra Trone, in Vaccaro, Talley Jr., and Price, *Cultural Heritage*, 203.

[214] Gladys Ethel Lang and Kurt Lang, *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), xi. Later, etchings again rose in value.

[215] Thompson, *Rubbish Theory*, 27.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid., 7, 9-10, 44. Objects can move between categories: from transient to rubbish to durable.

European Paleolithic art had already achieved, it needed an altered perception of its importance and value.[218] Concern for its durability was dependent upon increased valuation. Thus, Clottes made his case for its survival by focusing on the potential archaeological loss of what he refers to as "valuable heritage" and "cultural riches".[219]

Moreover, as Thompson notes, the perceived value of objects (including works of art) and their consequent durability is "a result of a social process of endowment";[220] these qualities are not intrinsic nor do they always follow from an object's material properties.[221] He explains that "the boundary between rubbish and non-rubbish moves in response to social pressures."[222] As his account of the shifting status of Stevengraphs illustrates, the perceived cultural value of an object can change dramatically between generations: in "1879 a Stevengraph would cost one shilling, in 1950 it would be unsaleable, and in 1971 it would be sold in auction […] for £75."[223] Therefore, a work of art's permanence is dependent upon more than the physical durability of its material components: the potentially fluctuating valuation of a work is equally determinative.[224]

In 1967 Roger H. Marijnissen expressed astonishment at the complete disregard for the fate of the fourteenth century "*Apocalypse* tapestries in Angers" in 1782:[225] Pieces of tapestry were used to: "mask cracks in a wall; […] to protect orange trees from the cold; […] as packing cloth and bedside rugs; […] in stables to prevent horses from scraping themselves on the swinging bail. […] to protect floors when ceilings were being repainted."[226] Marijnissen suggests that both aesthetic value (or taste) differences and an undeveloped sense of a work of art's historical value must have contributed to this complete lack of concern for its preservation.[227] Yet the

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[218] Jean Clottes, "Rock Art: An Endangered Heritage Worldwide," *Journal of Anthropological Research* (University of New Mexico) 64, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20371178.

[219] Ibid., 1-2.

[220] Thompson, *Rubbish Theory*, 50. Durability: their categorization as durable, transient, or rubbish.

[221] Ibid., 11, 50.

[222] Ibid., 11.

[223] Ibid., 14, Ch. 2.

[224] For example, although constructed of "weatherproof steel", Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, was destroyed—eight years after its installation—by the United States General Services Administration, who owned the site-specific work. This resulted after a legal battle between the artist and the GSA over its permanence. Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 48-49, 51-52.

[225] R. H. Marinjnissen, "Degradation, Conservation, and Restoration of Works of Art: Historical Overview," trans. Garrett White, in Vaccaro, Talley Jr., and Price, *Cultural Heritage*, 275, 78.

[226] Ibid., 278.

[227] Ibid., 279.

practice of destroying or changing works out of "necessity" to accommodate "new constructions or decorations" was, as Conti notes, also common in the sixteenth century;[228] it could equally be employed when damage to a work compromised its "figurative dignity" or undermined devotional utility.[229] Even what is valued in a work may change over time. Thus, when doctrinal correction or restoration of aesthetic quality was needed, artists were employed to fix other artists' paintings;[230] in later years, conservators who held the historicity of the original work to be of greater importance removed such alterations.[231] George Boas' chronicle of the *Mona Lisa*'s long-term appeal (up to 1940) also reveals a history replete with changing interests and interpretations.[232] He notes that whereas Vasari praised the painting for its skilled imitation of nature; others, under the influence of Romanticism, marveled at its embodiment of "the eternal feminine" and gave her smile new significance—a smile which is referenced to this day.[233] In short, what any given age saw to admire, value or even engage with in the work did not necessarily remain constant. Therefore, Boas proposed that a work which possesses enduring value—that is, it "'withstand[s] the test of time'"—does so because its nature is multivalent.[234] It is able to contain the "set of values determined by the preconceptions or the predominant interest of the new critic or observer."[235]

The value or appeal of a work is, thus, neither universally fixed nor historically unvarying. Indeed, these values may sometimes be conflicting. If the work's source of value can be culturally fluid, then so can the importance or nature of its preservation.[236] The history of conservation and restoration practices invariably reflects this; that which is perceived as the most important aspect of the work to preserve has varied over time. One marked difference, noted by Vacarro, is a work's relationship to the marks of time: "In the past the aim was, above all, to destroy traces

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[228] Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, 38, 40-41, 45, 51. See also examples of "restoration by […] overpainting" in Sheldon Keck, "Further Materials for a History of Conservation," in Vaccaro, Talley Jr., and Price, *Cultural Heritage*, 284-85.

[229] Ibid, 38, 40-41, 45, 51

[230] Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, 50-51, 55, 66.

[231] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 126-27.

[232] George Boas, "The Mona Lisa in the History of Taste." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 2 (1940): 207-24, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2707333; see also Lang and Lang, *Etched in Memory*, 348-49.

[233] Ibid., 209-10, 15-16. ; ibid., 349.

[234] Boas, "Mona Lisa," 224.

[235] Ibid., 224.

[236] For example, Conti notes that numerous wall paintings in medieval churches were later destroyed as part of renovations done "in the name of cleanliness, seemliness, [and] newness of décor". Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, 54-55.

of time, to make good the signs of damage, to reconstruct or recreate, to pursue in vain an unobtainable 'original condition'."[237] In contrast, Cesare Brandi's second principle in his 1963 *Teoria del restauro* asserts "*Restoration must aim to reestablish the potential unity of the work of art,* […] *without erasing every trace of the passage of time left on the work of art*."[238] Additionally, Caple notes that by the time the historic value of paintings was fully established, alterations such as "overpainting […] for public decency" and "in-painting of restored sections" had, respectively, either disappeared or were used in greater moderation.[239] Collector Agnes Gund includes amongst her and other collectors' responsibilities "to the artwork" that of "install[ing] it as the artist intended".[240] Yet historical practice has included both the reduction and enlargement of works to suit either a new location or a new frame.[241] While there has been a pervasive desire to keep the work in existence, there has certainly been no one method for doing this. For this reason, Muñoz Viñas describes contemporary conservation ethics in terms of the preservation of "meanings" by adapting conservation practices to meet the specific types of value the work has for interested parties.[242]

If, as we must acknowledge, a work's material properties alone cannot ensure its permanence, neither is the addition of outside interest or high valuation sufficient.[243] Overcoming the threat of mortality also requires conservation expertise (or access to it), adequate finances for the ongoing costs of conservation, and the existence of the technological means to achieve it.[244] For instance, when the costs of uncovering and presenting the whole of a preserved Roman villa proved too great, its

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[237] Vaccaro, "Introduction to Part III," 203-04.

[238] Cesare Brandi, "Theory of Restoration, I," in Vaccaro, Talley Jr., and Price, *Cultural Heritage*.

[239] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 126.

[240] Agnes Gund, "The Art Ecosystem: Art as It Exists within a Private Collection," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 121.

[241] For examples: Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, 99-103.

[242] Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 175, 177, 179, 213-14. For instance, a work may possess "scientific", "Social, high-cult symbolic" or "sentimental symbolic" meanings. Each necessitates different aspects of the work to be preserved in different ways.

[243] In addition, this interest must be a continuing interest: it must extend beyond the lifespan of any one individual. As Viola notes: the Ise Shrine's preservation depends upon "a ritual cycle that continues beyond a single human life span" for as long as there are those who "have a use for it". Viola, "Permanent Impermanence," 92.

[244] The Limoges enamels are a good example of the lack of this latter factor. Conti recounts the varying techniques that were developed in the eighteenth century to successfully transfer fresco and panel paintings from their original locations. Even then, the relationship between expertise, money, and a work's survival was evident. See Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, chapter five (esp. 138, 140, 142, 150-51).

walls and mosaics were simply reburied.[245] Clearly, limitations that are extrinsic to the work itself do exist. Given the reality of limited space and resources, some acknowledge that not all art that has been created *can* be saved—nor, some would say, should it. This "monumental burden" of care leads Peter Galassi to advocate for loss: "If everything created in the past were still around, it would […] stifle contemporary creativity. In short: If the culture is to live, some works of art must die."[246] Of course this introduces another dilemma: how to determine which works should remain. Thus, Cliff Einstein aptly concludes "So our great task of preserving begins with somebody telling us which objects we are supposed to preserve, because we cannot preserve them all."[247] While *selection* would appear to be the logical and necessary solution to these asset limitations, the process by which some works are chosen and others are not is fraught with complexity and hidden biases. Hence, a second set of value-laden questions is introduced, which affect a work's survival: *Who* decides *whose* art will be saved? W*hose* judgment prevails?

III. a. ii. 1. Preservation Decisions: *Whose* Art? *Whose* Judgment?

If people sharply disagree over the value, or even the purpose, of an object, then the object's endurance is put in peril, as the iconoclasm of the Reformation perfectly illustrates. Not all differences of opinion will end in such striking losses; however, art history is replete with instances that have resulted in damage and destruction, which, to some, seemed needless and unwarranted.[248] Yet not all disagreements and losses will be so publically visible. Although comparatively unseen, preservation is an *active* process of conservation, not simply the absence of destruction. As such, preservation is in itself an implicit act of judgment by which a work of art is deemed worthy of the money and attention needed to ensure its continued existence.[249] To preserve a work

[245] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 164. This reburial was, in effect, a means of preservation, but one that limited interaction. In their recommendations to the UK House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee, ICON draws attention to the necessity of taking these costs into account before making any acquisition. See section 6.2: The Institute of Conservation, "Submission to the House of Commons." See also: Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 202.

[246] Peter Galassi, "Conserving Photography and Preserving the Vitality of Our Culture." in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 83-84.

[247] Cliff Einstein, "Preserving Now," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 101.

[248] See previous example of the Angers tapestries.

[249] Indeed, Steiner highlights the non-neutrality and variability of aesthetic judgment: "The canonization of the aesthetic, the ascription to a work of classic and lasting values, engage power-relations at once pedagogic and ideological, political and mercantile. No aesthetic values are value-free

is to presume its value. Therefore, to not preserve a work is to have already assessed it at lesser or no value. For these reasons, Schwartz argues that museums serve as powerful arbiters of value through their acquisitions and rejections: they "disqualify as art the great majority of works that living artists produce, and therefore […] consign those works to the trash can."[250]

This connection between preservation and judgment also gives rise to the fear that a work's significance will be recognized only when it is too late. The possibility of error exposes the need for the right evaluative criteria to be used in the selection process—but *whose* criteria? Given the weight of this responsibility, Galassi admits the simplicity of a single infallible judge seems an attractive solution:

> Behind a few of the questions that surround this topic [of which things to preserve], I sense a hope, or even a longing, that some sort of Supreme Being will hand down the right answer so we can all just follow that dictum and avoid worrying about the question.[251]

Yet Galassi asserts that culture already provides its own safety net for this aesthetic angst:

> The culture is not only the broad consensus about great and lasting works, it is also the dissenter from the prevailing wisdom—the independent nut who gets very excited about one particular class of objects and decides to preserve them, and then, a hundred years later, people realize that what he or she saved was, in fact, the best stuff.[252]

Acknowledging that aesthetic values inevitably vary with every generation, Arthur Danto also rejects the need for a universally prescriptive voice;[253] instead, ordinary cultural processes (as "in politics") determine what should be saved.[254] He argues that since we are unable to know what will be of interest to the future we can only "preserve what is meaningful to us now" by a process that will invariably involve

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or, despite Kant, wholly disinterested in an ideological sense. Taste, moreover, is at all times subject to correction, to revision and even complete reversal." Steiner, *Grammars*, 207.

[250] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 73. Sarah Thorton's ethnographic study of the art world supports this claim. Without denying actual aesthetic merit, she notes that her "research suggests that great works do not just arise; they are made—not just by artists and their assistants but also by the dealers, curators, critics, and collectors who 'support' the work." Sarah Thorton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (London: Granta, 2009), xiv, 258.

[251] Galassi, "Conserving Photography," 84.

[252] Ibid.

[253] Danto, Arthur C. "Looking at the Future Looking at the Present as Past," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 9.

[254] Ibid., 11.

negotiation and persuasion.[255] Similarly, Muñoz Viñas advocates "*negotiatory* conservation" as a way to address the preservation conflicts that result from a work's multiple "meanings".[256] Yet while Galassi and Danto trust implicitly in the adequacy of their methods, not all do. Some argue that the system unfairly privileges the decisions of those with cultural power and influence: insufficient attention is given to preserving those works that do not reflect the viewpoint and values of the majority. These were the concerns expressed at a 1998 conference on the future of twentieth-century art by contemporary artists Keith Morrison and Judy Chicago. Morrison insists:

> […] our major museums continue to be dominated by the face and agenda of the male European and Euro-American paradigm, a paradigm that perpetuates an agenda—whether by omission or commission, it matters not—of and for the preservation of the Western civilization as defined by Europeans and Euro-Americans.[257]

He argues that only by changing the racial and cultural paradigm of the decision-makers will it be possible to circumvent these biases and "realize the goal of preserving the best art of *all* people for mortality or immortality."[258] Similarly, Chicago's own artistic practices have been driven by the desire to overcome what she finds to be a persistent gender bias that disallows fair representation of the contribution of women:[259]

> Perhaps because of my acute awareness of the fragility of our cultural memory of women's achievements, I could not adopt a cavalier attitude toward permanence in art. […] However, like most artists, I assumed that if I created art that was considered important, the result would be the exhibition and preservation of that work by the art community. Boy, was I in for an education![260]

As Chicago observes, the dominant values of a culture are invariably reflected in preservation decisions: "One important way in which the centrality of the male experience is acknowledged is through those many works of art by men that have

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[255] From an account of Danto's *Mortality Immortality?* conference address: Constantine, "Preserving the Legacy."

[256] Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 209, 14.

[257] Keith Morrison, "Preserving Whose Mortality or Immortality?," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 161.

[258] Ibid., 161-62. Emphasis mine.

[259] Judy Chicago, "Hope Springs Eternal: One Artist's Struggle for Immortality," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 147-48.

[260] Ibid., 148-49.

been considered sufficiently valuable to preserve."[261] Even Muñoz Viñas' seemingly even-handed approach to negotiation, which considers how "to satisfy" the greatest number of "meanings" a work holds for different people, prioritizes "two special groups of *stakeholders* whose needs must be catered to: academic or cultivated users of the object, and future users of the object."[262]

Both Morrison and Chicago's comments underline the collective belief that the continuing existence of a work of art, which preservation ensures, is indicative of its merit. Moreover, this equation of permanence and value operates equally in reverse; a non-enduring work cannot have merited much. When Lang and Lang began researching reasons for the long-term obscurity of women-etchers relative to their male counterparts they solicited answers from aesthetically knowledgeable persons, who frequently responded: "They weren't very good, were they."[263] Lang and Lang, however, pointed out the insufficiency of their reasoning: "Yet this ready-made explanation was advanced by respondents who could not have seen much, if anything of these women's oeuvres. Indeed, its inaccessibility was for them sufficient proof that they could not have been very good."[264] Thus, the endurance of a work was regarded as tantamount to its greatness. However, Lang and Lang discovered that the longevity of an artist's reputation—and by implication, her work—is not dependent merely upon the quality of the work but upon specific steps the artist undertakes to ensure its cultural survival beyond her death; reputation and preservation are interconnected.[265] Because of this, failure to act to influence the future leaves the artist's work and name in danger of being forgotten. In the case of the etchers, "the artist had to have produced a critical mass of work, kept adequate records to guarantee its proper attribution, and made arrangements for its proper custodianship."[266] In addition, "the artist's proximity to an institutional system for archiving" was critical.[267] Future visibility was further influenced by the artists' connections to those whom society already regarded as significant, whether artistically or culturally.[268] While Lang and Lang's concern was to establish the cause of the female etchers'

[261] Ibid., 147.
[262] Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 209, 14.
[263] Lang and Lang, *Etched in Memory*, 275. All words were capitalized in the original text.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid., 317, 19, 31.
[266] Ibid. 319.
[267] Ibid., 331.
[268] Ibid. As Chicago also realized, cultural and symbolic capital can be significantly influential.

obscurity, their observations reveal how readily preservation is influenced by non-aesthetic factors. They also open the door to the possibility that a work might have had enduring aesthetic value in spite of its impermanence.

Moreover, the critical role that money plays in conservation choices should not be overlooked. If the expenditure of money correlates with the degree to which something is valued, then monetary considerations will also factor into a work's survival. Thus, Muñoz Viñas acknowledges the role of "resource allocation" in conservation decisions.[269] Schwartz argues that the enormous amount of money and effort that must be expended to save works of art means that economic distinctions and cultural disparities will simply be simply perpetuated and reinforced:[270]

> But, in addition to being patently inadequate, such efforts may also be harmful, since they intensify existing class and national differences in wealth and sophistication, distort historical relationships, fetishize art objects and perpetuate the myth of artistic eternity.[271]

When the *Economist* assessed the actions of Casoria Contemporary Art Museum director Antonio Manfredi's "Art War"—in which works of art were burned in protest of the Italian government's funding cuts for cultural institutions—it noted money's crucial influence on an artwork's longevity:[272]

> The entire process [of the "Art War" protest] has been turned into an exhibition with a poignant message: looking after these pieces costs money. Galleries and museums are trusted to care for artwork; without funding, they cannot do so.[273]

Manfredi reiterated this relationship between valuation, preservation, and purse strings: "'Our 1,000 artworks are headed for destruction anyway because of the government's indifference'."[274] Writing for the University of Sydney's blog "The Business of Art", Lena Peacock suggests that once an object is owned by a museum or collector, the approach to preservation is commensurate with the desire to "'get

[269] Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 192, 202-03. Money is only one of the resources he implies.

[270] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.

[271] Ibid.

[272] BBC, "Italian museum"; C.S.W. "Up in Flames." *Prospero* (blog), *The Economist*, April 26, 2012. http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2012/04/government-funding-arts.

[273] Ibid.

[274] BBC, "Italian museum."

their money's worth' from this object, which is determined by how long the artwork will last in their collection."[275] Again, money and permanence are interconnected.

Each of these examples highlights hidden factors that can influence preservation decisions. Many voices vie for this determinative role but not all possess equal power. Whether the issue is funding or the cultural importance of a work, Chicago rightly asks: "Who decides what art is to be valued and preserved and according to what criteria?"[276] If the first question of preservation—"*Whose* art?"—reveals the biases that surround such judgments, it also intimates a second area of dispute: "*Whose* judgment?" This frequently more visible conflict of interest occurs when the valuation and desired preservation outcomes of two or more parties clash.[277] Hence, two additional considerations arise: *To whom does the art belong? Whose interests should prevail?*

As Schwartz reports, collector Ryoei Saito sparked outrage when he announced plans to have a Van Gogh and a Renoir (*Portrait of Dr. Gachet* and *Au Moulin de la Galette*, respectively) "cremated with him upon his death."[278] While Schwartz notes that this sort of inclusion of "objects dear to their owners" reflects a common Japanese practice, it was anathema to those for whom the works' destruction represented devaluation and callous misuse of power.[279] While the meaning behind Saito's original declaration and the motivation for his subsequent retraction are not entirely clear—a joke, a misunderstood figure of speech, or as Saito himself explained, an expression of his desire *for* their preservation—the strong public response of disapproval and even anger illustrates the tensions that can result when deeply held beliefs come into conflict.[280]

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[275] Lena Peacock, "To Decay, or Not to Decay?," *The Business of Art* (blog), University of Sydney, August 13, 2006, http://blogs.usyd.edu.au/bizart/2006/08/contemporary_ephemeral_artwork.html.

[276] Chicago, "Hope Springs Eternal," 148.

[277] See Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 5, 209, 14.

[278] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 72. Mark D. Fefer, "The Curse of the Masterpiece," *Fortune* 129, no. 9 (May 2, 1994), *Business Source Premier*, EBSCO*host*, Accessed February 6, 2015, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=9404277802&site=eds-live.

[279] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 72. "The staid daily Le Figaro splashed SCANDAL across its front page. The director of French museums huffed that 'even the most pharaohesque of pharaohs took care of the art works that were buried with them.' More explicit Japan-bashing came from the Tribune de Geneve, a Swiss daily: "Masterpieces in Peril-the Yellow Peril," ran the caption below its cartoon of a bucktoothed Asian man tossing paintings into an open coffin." "Ashes to Ashes, But Not with Your Van Gogh," *Newsweek* 117, no. 21 (May 27, 1991): *Business Source Premier*, EBSCO*host*, accessed February 6, 2015, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=9105271572&site=eds-live">Ashes to ashes, but not with your van Gogh, 35.

[280] Ibid.; Carolyn Kleiner, "Van Gogh's Vanishing Act," *U.S. News & World Report* 129, no. 4 (July 24, 2000), EBSCO*host*, accessed February 6, 2015,

When the Bamiyan, Afghanistan Buddhas were deliberately destroyed in 2001 it marked the failure of UNESCO's efforts to secure the statues' survival against the opposition of the reigning Taliban government.[281] To its leader, Mullah Omar, UNESCO's appeal for their protection, which stripped the sculptures of their religious identity, was suspect;[282] he asserted instead that their destruction was an appropriate response to idolatry.[283] In contrast, UNESCO emphasized the Buddhas' destruction as a universal loss and presumed global agreement on this point when they described it as an action that "shook the world".[284] To artist Lowry Burgess, it showed blatant disregard for what he saw as their *obviously* significant value; in his view, this incident was no less than a violation of the statues' rights.[285] Spurred on by a deep sense of protest over the outcome, Burgess launched his "Toronto Manifesto" with the aim of creating a universally enforceable agreement that would protect all "historical treasures" from any such future injustices.[286] Interestingly, Burgess chose to ground his manifesto in those laws that protect vulnerable humans from harm,[287] thereby blurring the line between inanimate artifact and living being. In his mind, their right to protection was much the same as a human being's. According to Burgess,

> In the structure of the Manifesto's logic, these abandoned sites have a fundamental right to claim protection before the world. They have the right of justice under the most ancient customary law requiring justice and protection for widows, orphans, and the dead.[288]

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http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=3324056&site=eds-live, 44.

[281] Lowry Burgess, "Beyond the Destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas," in Schachter and Brockman, *(Im)permanence*, 249; Pierre Centlivres, "Life, Death, and Eternity of the Buddhas in Afghanistan," trans. Liz Libbrecht, in *Iconoclahs: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2002) 75.

[282] Ibid.

[283] Ibid. Even if the Taliban's motives were political rather than theological, as some suggest, the resulting power struggle over the statues' long-term survival remains a conflict of valuation: the nature and purpose of the statues were not viewed in the same way by both parties. For a discussion of motives see: Jean-François Clément , "The Empty Niche of the Bamiyan Buddha," in Latour and Weibel, *Iconoclash*, 218; Jean-Michel Frodon, "The War of Images, or the Bamiyan Paradox," trans. Liz Libbrecht, in Latour and Weibel, *Iconoclash*.

[284] The "Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley" (inlcuding the "Buddha Statues" were judged by UNESCO to be of "Outstanding Universal Value". UNESCO, "Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley," *UNESCO*, accessed April 5, 2014, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/208/.

[285] Burgess, "Bamiyan Buddhas," 254.

[286] Ibid., 251, 54.

[287] Ibid., 254.

[288] Ibid.

Yet Burgess was hardly an impartial advocate; his interest was also personal. The vision for and placement of his 1968-1974 installation "The Inclined Galactic Light Pond" in Bamiyan specifically referenced the Buddhas.[289]

The question "*Whose* judgment?" reminds us that art's perdurance cannot be divorced from those differences of opinion that stem from conflicting values. Although UNESCO and Burgess assume the moral high ground, we should ask why their desires should be considered pre-eminent.[290] As Andrew Todd and Caygill both note, ongoing neglect had long preceded the Buddhas' dramatic destruction.[291] At some point in the statues' lifespan, the Buddhist community for whom they were created ceased to exist;[292] as a result both the value reflected in their original purpose and preservation state changed. Todd suggests that the strong response to the loss of the statues is largely the product of a Western "attachment to permanence" as well as a distinct understanding of "freedom of religion".[293] In such cases, whose values should prevail?

During the Victorian era, Britain and the Continent saw heated debate erupt over the restoration of churches.[294] Opinion sharply divided over whether or not the practice of restoring a building according to the "principle of preference" was an appropriate preservation response.[295] This pursuit of "l'unité de style" meant that architectural elements could be removed or added in order to return the building to a particular period or style—usually the one conceived of as its architectural vision at origination.[296] However, in practice, as Stephen Tschudi-Madsen notes, this "original" and preferred historic period tended to be to be the Decorated Gothic style above all others.[297] Of course this also meant that churches could be "returned" to a state in which they had never previously existed.[298] In contrast, Ruskin's unequivocal Anti-

[289] Ibid., 250.

[290] Admittedly, this is a complex issue especially when art becomes a tool for political power games (cultural or religious oppression) and is used or destroyed for such reasons.

[291] Caygill, "Destruction of Art," 165-66; Andrew Todd, "The Island of Impermanence," in Schachter and Brockman, *(Im)permanence*, 43.

[292] Caygill, "Destruction of Art," 166.

[293] Todd, "Island of Impermanence," 43.

[294] Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration*, 14-18. The term "restoration" took on multiple meanings, some viewed pejoratively.

[295] Ibid., 37.

[296] Ibid., 35-37.

[297] Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration*, 36.

[298] Ibid., 36. See examples on page 35; see plates of restorations starting on page 164. At the time, Violett le-Duc defined restoration: "to reestablish it [the edifice] in a finished state, which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time." Eugène-Emmanuel Violette-le-Duc, "Restoration," In Vaccaro, Talley Jr., and Price, *Cultural Heritage*, 314.

Restoration stance stressed the importance of preserving the evidence of history's passage intact, without any such alterations, and the shared ownership of a building between its past and future generations:

> I must not leave the truth unstated, that it is again no question of expediency or feeling whether we shall preserve the buildings of past times or not. *We have no right whatever to touch them.* They are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us. […] Or whatsoever else it might be which in those buildings they intended to be permanent, we have no right to obliterate.[299]

Yet even architect George Edmund Street, a proponent of retaining a building's architectural history, found that "antiquity" versus "convenience" forced a compromise when the structure of an ancient church building was found to be ill suited to its current congregation's needs.[300] From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, Muñoz Viñas observes that the irreconcilability of Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc's approaches were a foretaste of the issues that would continue to plague conservation theorists.[301]

As each of these situations demonstrates, decision-making in regard to preservation is remarkably complex, especially when strongly held values come into conflict.[302] Whose judgment should prevail? There is no simple answer.

III. a. ii. 2. Preservation Decisions: Preserving *for* and *from*

Situations such as these, in which interested parties sharply disagree, raise important questions concerning a work's future and purpose: To whom does a work ultimately belong? Do the artist's wishes trump those of the collector? Or vice versa? Which generation takes precedence—the living, the dead, or those not yet born? Hence, Muñoz Viñas thinks the question contemporary conservators should always consider is "why, and for whom the conservation process is done."[303] In his handbook for museum educators, Graeme Talboys suggests that, as stewards of "collective social memory", museums are tasked with providing and ensuring society's future access to

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[299] Ruskin, *Seven Lamps*, 201.

[300] Ibid., 60.

[301] Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 4-5.

[302] See Muñoz Viñas on "clashes in meaning: inter- and intra-cultural issues in conservation". Ibid., 165-70.

[303] Ibid., 170, 214. He argues that this allows conservation to address the various meanings a work has for people, which are not universal.

the voices of the past.[304] As noted previously, Caple similarly affirms the "present emphasis" on future-focused stewardship.[305] However, given the natural propensity of artworks to succumb to deterioration over time, the task of straddling the past, present, and future of a work is a difficult one; those responsible for the conservation of art (and other cultural objects) find they must carefully manage the challenging relationship between public accessibility and a work's longevity. Noting, "'we are bad for objects'",[306] Caple remarks, "As the detrimental effects of human beings on objects becomes more clearly appreciated […], the level of contact between objects and humans is increasingly managed and limited."[307] As Talboys also observes, "Even in open societies, there are some people with collections, buildings and sites in their guardianship who feel that the only way to care for them properly is to prevent all access to them."[308] It is a sad irony that works must be kept *from* people in order to keep them *for* people.

As we saw earlier, reburial (which effectively removes a work from view) was the preservation solution adopted for the walls and mosaic floors of a Roman villa in Gloucestershire.[309] When the future of the Lascaux cave paintings was threatened by deterioration, access was restricted to the occasional scholar;[310] tourists must now be satisfied with replicas of both the cave and the paintings.[311] Managing the tension between presentation and preservation almost invariably privileges one group or generation over another. Thus, disparity in access can also result in the creation of an elite minority for whom the cultural stewards make special allowances: in this case, the scholar or researcher. Nevertheless, if the stability of a work cannot be maintained by other means, removing the original from circulation is often seen as the best way to prolong its life. It is this state of "absolute zero" that curator Galassi knows offers the only sure protection: "[…] we now know precisely how we can save all of our

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[304] Talboys, Graeme K., *Museum Educator's Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 5,7,9,11.
Talboys references the ICOM (International Council on Museums) definition, which emphasizes the museum's ongoing cultural duty as a: "*non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment, for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment*." As quoted in ibid., 7.

[305] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 203.

[306] Ibid., 159.

[307] Ibid.

[308] Talboys, *Museum Educator's Handbook*, 8.

[309] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 164.

[310] Ibid., 165.

[311] Ibid.

photographs forever: by sealing and freezing them — and never looking at them again."[312] If the preeminent goal is the longevity of a work, then limiting access does offer at least a partial means of achieving it. The Scottish National Gallery's J.M.W. Turner watercolor collection is displayed only one month a year, in January, at the benefactor's request.[313] The Gallery notes that the "limited exposure" resulting from this over 100-year old practice has allowed "the works [to retain] their luminous colours and pristine condition."[314]

Occasionally, however, some prioritize other aspects a work over its long-term survival. Hence, Laurel Reuter has repeatedly placed works of contemporary art in situations that are potentially harmful and may contribute to their destruction.[315] She has done so quite consciously, with full knowledge of the risks.[316] This has included taking an exhibition to China during the time of Tiananmen Square or allowing works to be shown in museums with substandard conditions.[317] While aware that for others such decisions raise significant concerns, Reuter is convinced that above all, "a work of art must live out its life in its own time."[318] At times, this has meant "choos[ing] the living existence of works of art over their preservation", thereby potentially limiting (or even eliminating) future interaction with the work, in order that the work might be allowed to speak to the present generation in which it was created.[319] Actions such as Reuter's allow us to consider the possibility that there might be other things more important than permanence. Specifically, they suggest that embracing finitude may open the way for experiences that would otherwise not be possible. Reuter's emphasis on "living" also suggests that human existence might be better experienced as full engagement in the midst of finitude, rather than focused simply on avoiding it. As Davies argues, there are "those prepared to build 'death' into their life-style and those who are not";[320] only the former practice fosters the possibility of "intensive living".[321]

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[312] Ibid., 32; Galassi, "Conserving Photography," 82-83. He is, however, *not* advocating this solution.

[313] National Galleries Scotland, "Turner in January," in *What's On* (National Galleries Scotland, December 2014-February 2015), 5.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Laurel Reuter, "A Life in Its Own Times," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 178-79.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid.

[318] Ibid., 182.

[319] Ibid., 179.

[320] Davies, *Theology of Death*, 177.

[321] Ibid.

III. a. iii. Aesthetic Intent

What does the artist intend?

The final factor to be considered in the potential for a work's perdurance returns to its creative beginning: what did the artist intend?[322] Gober's explicit desire for his work to "last forever" set in motion a conservation process that was able to achieve his aim. Many artists, like Gober, Chicago, or those whose aesthetic traditions are rooted in creating non-ephemeral artifacts, intend and expect their works to be permanent.[323] As we have already seen, it is critical that others share this interest in their continuing existence. At the very least, this is necessary following the artist's death.[324] Moreover, as Caple observes, consideration of the artist's desires is no longer merely a matter of preference; it is also a legal one.[325] The artist does not necessarily abdicate her rights even if another owns the work. As evidence of this, Caple references the Berne Convention: "'the author shall have the right to claim authorship of the work and to object to, any distortion, mutilation or other modification of, or derogatory action in relation to, the said work, which would be prejudicial to his honour or reputation'."[326] As a result, he notes, conservation is now generally practiced in consultation with the artist, if living, before any treatments or alterations are attempted.[327]

However, not all artists desire or pursue permanence for their works. James Coddington, chief conservator at the MOMA in New York, reminds us that "what is effectively different" in the world of contemporary art "is those works that are explicitly meant to vanish […] they are not meant to survive; that is the artist's

[322] I am narrowly defining this as the artist's intent regarding permanence. For the issue of artist intentions regarding a work's meaning and its relationship to conservation, see Dykstra, "Artist's Intentions."

[323] Painting is one such tradition; however, exceptions exist: Murakami's *Peeling Off Painting* (1957) is, as the title indicates, inherently fragile and intended to be so. Paul Schimmel, "Intentionality and Performance-Based Art," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 137.

[324] For this reason, valuer Jeffrey P. Fuller offers advice to artists regarding their artistic estate: Jeffrey P. Fuller, "What Will Happen to Your Art after You Die?," *Senior Artists Initiative*, accessed October 31, 2013, http://www.seniorartists.org/afterdeath.html. Lang and Lang note the posthumous role played by both museums and relatives: Lang and Lang, *Etched in Memory*, 287, 300, 23, 26, 33.

[325] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 193.

[326] As quoted in ibid.

[327] Ibid. I have limited my discussion to the artist's intent in regard to the permanence or impermanence of the work, the scope of aesthetic intention more broadly concerns the purpose and meaning of a work in conjunction with its medium. See Dykstra, "Artist's Intentions," 212.

intention."[328] Since the 1960s art practices have increasingly been characterized by the deliberate or indifferent use of highly perishable materials or the intentional destruction of a work—that is, where loss is not dictated by the innate durability of the medium. Schwartz interprets Joshua Rozenman's series of self-portraits "in which an identical image is cast in various impermanent materials: wax, tar, charcoal, soap, dough, polyester, papier mâché, fertilizer and sawdust" as a conscious decision to embrace the mortality of art.[329] Also, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, whose work will be discussed in chapter three, have made intentional ephemerality the hallmark of their large-scale sculptural installations, entirely for aesthetic reasons.

For some, impermanence is a deliberate aesthetic choice and central to a work's meaning;[330] for others, it is simply the result of indifference to the work's endurance.[331] For instance, Ernest Neto's installations are made of "many different kinds of materials; nylon, Styrofoam, wood, powdered lead, paper, string, and others"; but for him, the longevity of his original work is of little interest.[332] When Mildred Constantine spoke with Ed Rossbach (whose materials include both fibre and trash) about deterioration, he also showed scant concern:[333] "'I can't honestly say that I think much about the condition of my baskets in fifty years. I use whatever material is necessary to my expression, even if it is newspapers that will turn yellow tomorrow. I use the best materials I can, but I do not allow consideration of conservation to determine what I do.'"[334] Even deliberate destruction does not always provoke concern. Sculptor John Brown participated in Manfredi's "Art War" protest by destroying one of his own works. However, the loss resulting from this act of solidarity did not cause Brown any personal distress.[335] For him, the importance of preserving the work of art was secondary to the act of creating and engaging with it: "We work in a fairly contemporary manner so the process of making art, and the interaction with people, is more important than keeping it as a precious object."[336]

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[328] Coddington, "Case Against Amnesia," 20. Schwartz also notes this: Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.

[329] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.

[330] Mary O'Neil looks specifically at "works in which the ephemerality is a means of communicating mourning" in O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art."

[331] Dykstra, "Artist's Intentions," 200.

[332] These thoughts were expressed in a conversation with Mildred Constantine. She, however, could not share his disinterest. Constantine, preface to Corzo, xii.

[333] Ibid.

[334] Ibid.

[335] BBC, "Italian museum."

[336] Ibid.

Moreover, in some cases, permanence would contradict an artist's aesthetic purposes. Although a means of preservation was achieved for Leonard's *Strange Fruit*, her rejection of it reinforced her intended relationship between the work's meaning and its transience: "The very essence of the piece is to decompose. The absurdity, irony, pain and humor of it is that we attempt to hang on to memory, but we forget."[337] Although, as we have already seen, others may find such impermanence problematic, if the intention of the artist is adhered to, the length of a work's existence is at least partially pre-determined.[338]

III. a. iv. Acts of God

In the end, the degree to which a work of art is intended to be permanent may matter little. One final factor—"acts of God"—may usurp all other preservative influences and undo even the best-laid plans. These include both natural and man-made disasters: catastrophic events, which befall a work unexpectedly. Although often devastating in effect, they are also unpredictable and uncertain occurrences; it is quite possible they will never exercise any definitive influence over a work's perdurance.[339] Yet when they occur they reveal the truly fragile existence of even the most seemingly stable and enduring works of art. Thompson notes the resulting shock when Renaissance works were destroyed in a Florentine flood.[340] In 2012 Makoto Fujimura was one of many New York City Chelsea gallery artists whose work fell victim to the waters of Superstorm Sandy:

> No amount of rational persuasion will change the depth of my pain as I heard the list of works destroyed. Olana – Vision, Trinity screens, Gravity and Grace, Emily Dickinson's Trinity, Interior Castles […]. Over twenty significant works of mine, and over fifty small works and prints were

[337] As quoted in Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 145.

[338] Yet the power of Brown's destruction of his work as part of the "Art War" depends upon other's desire for or expectation of its permanence. They must view it (and the other works which were destroyed) as a valuable loss; indifference to its destruction robs the action of its force.

[339] This is not to say that their possibility is ignored. The AIC, in characteristic fashion, strongly warns of the need to be prepared for such events and is involved in equipping and assisting others to care for collections in the face of disasters. They have their own "Collections Emergency Response Team". See "America's Treasures at Risk," "Disaster Response & Recovery," and "AIC-CERT": American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, "Publications and Resources," accessed January 12, 2015, http://www.conservation-us.org/publications-resources/disaster-response-recovery#.VLRCZYqsW_c.

[340] Thompson, *Rubbish Theory*, 104-05.

> underwater, mixed with many other precious works by other artists, on the evening of October 29th in Chelsea.[341]

Like water, fire can also erase any expectations of permanence. Such was the agent that destroyed several works of contemporary British art at a Momart storage facility in 2004.[342] Similarly, in 2014, a fire at The Glasgow School of Art ravaged the building and its "iconic library", destroying original Charles Rennie Mackintosh-designed Art Nouveau furnishings in addition to works created by students in preparation for their degree show.[343]

Although war's origins are human rather than "divine", it also introduces significant risks into the endurance of art equation; ordinary conservation practices do not protect museum collections and cultural monuments from the damage and loss caused by bombs and artillery.[344] Conti notes the destruction of Renaissance painter Dosso Dossi's *Immaculate Conception* altarpiece in Dresden during the Second World War;[345] only photographs of the work remain.[346] Recognition of the hazards of war has resulted in the creation of forces tasked with mitigating its effects on cultural artifacts.[347] Drawing upon the research of Richard Arndt, Major James B. Cogbill of the U.S. Army recounts the U.S. Military's Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Services' (MFA&A) officers' successes during World War II:[348] they were both able to save works of art and limit potential damage to culturally significant sites, which were located in combat areas.[349] However, he does so to compare the relative failure of the U.S. to accomplish the same in Iraq in 2003, attributing this in part to the lack of a permanent military body devoted to planning for the protection of cultural

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[341] Makoto Fuijimura, "Sandy, Golden Sea and Dillon Gallery," *Makoto Fuijimura* (blog), November 10, 2012, http://makotofujimura.com/writings/sandy-golden-sea-and-dillon-gallery/.

[342] Caygill, "Destruction of Art," 166.

[343] BBC, "Glasgow School of Art Fire: Iconic Library Destroyed," *BBC News*. May 25, 2014, accessed February 11, 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-27556659; Muriel Gray, "Statement from Muriel Gray on the state of the Macintosh Building," *The Glasgow School of Art Media Centre* (blog), May 24, 2014, accessed February 11, 2015, http://gsapress.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/statement-from-muriel-gray-on-state-of.html.

[344] In recent years, UNESCO has expressed significant concern for cultural heritage sites in imminent danger of damage and loss from ongoing conflicts: UNESCO, "'Stop the Destruction!' Urges UNESCO Director-General," *UNESCO*, April 30, 2013, accessed February 12, 2015, http://whc.unesco.org/news/1067/.

[345] Conti, *Restoration and Conservation*, 66-67.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Cogbill, James B. "Protection of Arts and Antiquities During Wartime: Examining the Past and Preparing for the Future," special edition, *Military Review* (August 2008): 203-04, accessed July 22, 2014, *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection*, EBSCOhost.

[348] Ibid., 204.

[349] Ibid.

treasures as a priority.[350] Nonetheless, success requires the participation of all parties, ally and enemy alike; but even combined efforts cannot guarantee it.

Of course, whether the danger comes in the form of fire, flood, or artillery, the material properties of a work will also affect its ability to withstand these and other threats; the wooden construction of the Mackintosh furnishings surely made fire their greatest natural enemy. As unexpected and extraordinary occurrence, these "acts of God" override any innate naturally stability—and thus longevity—which works already possess and, therefore, are a decisive factor in any pursuit of permanence. Even Gober's carefully preserved donuts seem unlikely to survive all such events.

IV. Conclusions

All things considered, it is difficult not to concur with Schwartz's emphatic assertion that art is innately mortal. When the numerous and complex factors that determine the brevity or longevity of any single work's lifespan are taken into account, it becomes clear that art's hold on immortality is a decidedly tenuous one; our preservation efforts only artificially and temporarily prolong existence—and even then only for a limited number of works.[351] While in the West the pursuit of permanence has dominated the response to aesthetic finitude, such a response is neither compulsory nor universal. Instead, it reflects a particular cultural-aesthetic moment in history whereby the desire for and capacity to achieve the artwork's perdurance have converged to create the opportunity. Thus, when Biringuccio advocated acceptance of the artwork's transience he likely did so because his sixteenth-century context reinforced the expectation of finitude: the lack of ability to significantly affect lasting material change, a religious framework in which human mortality was integral, and a reality in which death was prevalent and highly visible. Hence, while finitude manifested through change, decay, and loss is universal, the response to it is not.

Not only do varied attitudes and approaches to transience and preservation exist between generations, they also co-exist across cultures simultaneously. Clottes recounts one unexpected collision of views involving rock art in Alice Springs, Australia.[352] When paintings were damaged by a tree branch's repeated contact with

[350] Ibid., 206-09 The MFA&A did not continue in existence to the present.

[351] As Schwartz states, "all we can do is to protract the process for a minuscule and idiosyncratically chosen number of works." Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.

[352] Clottes, "Rock Art," 2, 4.

the surface of the rock, a proposal was made to remove the offending limb. While this seemed a perfectly reasonable solution to the colleague who suggested it, consultation with the Aboriginal owners revealed radically different concerns; since spirits of deceased ancestors were believed to reside in trees, the preservation of the branch (and the tree) was of equal importance to the paintings.[353] Indeed, as we saw in the example of the Tibetan Buddhist monks' sand mandalas, spiritual beliefs can be a formative influence on a culture's response to transience. Thus, the Japanese aesthetic of impermanence is, as Yuriko Saito observes, similarly rooted in key tenets of Buddhism; consequently, it emphasizes acceptance over resistance:

> The Japanese aesthetic tradition, heavily indebted to the Buddhist worldview, provides a means of coping with this otherwise painful condition of our existence. Keeping with the general Buddhist foundation, which starts with the recognition of our impermanence and problems derived from it, the Japanese aesthetic tradition works at changing our attitude and outlook by aestheticizing these challenging existential conditions, rendering them more appealing.[354]

This approach also provides a sense of comfort through shared destiny. Human and aesthetic finitudes are joined by a common experience, which inadvertently provides a means of coping with them. Saito explains:

> [B]y drawing an analogy between our own transience and the ephemeral aspects of the world, we console ourselves with the realization that nothing whatever is exempt from this law of nature, accompanied by the feeling of camaraderie that "we are all in it together." That is, if there were some things that stay the same, our own transience will be harder to bear, because we wonder why we cannot be more like them. However, by admitting the common fate that binds everybody and everything in this world, we feel in a way reassured that we are not singled out as exceptions.[355]

The tea ceremony is perhaps one of the better-known manifestations of this aesthetic.[356] A highly ritualized experience, it celebrates the singularity and beauty of the evanescent moment as a microcosm of those qualities ("transience, insufficiency, imperfection, and accidents") that characterize the world.[357] In this way, beauty is intensified by sorrow, and further emphasized through the simplicity and imperfection

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[353] Ibid.

[354] Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199278350.001.0001, 187.

[355] Ibid., 186

[356] For instance, it is highlighted in Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 95.

[357] Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 187-88, 363.

of the elements utilized in the ceremony:[358] for instance, the "iron kettle" displays "the beauty of metal's impermanence".[359] Moreover, this perspective is extended to other interactions through the practice of aesthetic formality, which, Charles Inoyue argues, allows every meeting to be experienced as if it were the first; through the knowledge that "the first time is also the last time" joy and sorrow are joined in a single experience.[360] As mentioned in chapter one, a similar sentiment is present in Keats's "Ode on Melancholy":

> She [Melancholy] dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding Adieu […][361]

Seeking to translate this Japanese aesthetic for a Western audience, Andrews Juniper explains, "a large part of the value accorded to [wabi sabi art] lies in its ephemeral nature and in the fact that the same moment will never come again."[362] In addition, the cosmological orientation of this approach innately assumes both the foolishness and futility of trying to arrest "a constant state of flux" in which "all things […] evolve from nothing and devolve back to nothing."[363] Instead, "beauty [is found] in the imperfections" this creates.[364] Thus, value lies not in attaining permanence but in acknowledging and finding beauty in transience.

We have briefly examined other instances in the West in which a work's permanence was neither desired nor sought, including Leonard's *Strange Fruit* and Fung's *The Snow Show*; while religious frameworks can play a role in such works' ephemerality, these were often influenced by the desire to reflect (both positively and negatively) the transient experiences of life. The contributions of this perspective will be explored further in subsequent chapters, but we might draw one preliminary inference: there is something to be gained by embracing finitude. The pursuit of permanence, therefore, is not an inevitable or universal response to transience; as the contrasting fates of Leonard's decaying fruit and Gober's preserved donuts illustrate,

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[358] See Charles Shiro Inouye, *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), doi:10.1057/9780230615489, 85.

[359] Andrew Juniper, *Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence* (Boston: Tuttle, 2003), 129; see also Inouye, *Evanescence and Form*, 86.

[360] Ibid., 86.

[361] Keats, *Poetry and Prose*, 474.

[362] Juniper, *Wabi Sabi*, 1, 94.

[363] Ibid., 1.

[364] Ibid.

both acceptance and resistance are viable aesthetic possibilities.[365] While the latter has enjoyed a position of prominence in the West, the rise of ephemeral artistic offerings has refocused attention on transience and opened the door to considering what might be gained from a loosened grip on permanence. Yet, while art undeniably exhibits finitude, the desire for its permanence is not entirely misplaced; art also exhibits immortality, and it is to this that we now turn.

THE IMMORTALITY OF ART

V. Transcendence of Finitude

immortal: "Not liable to perish or decay; everlasting, imperishable, unfading, incorruptible."[366]

immortality: "The condition of being celebrated through all time; enduring fame or remembrance."[367]

If establishing the inherent mortality of art was an uphill battle for Schwartz in 1996, it was because belief in the "immortality of art" already held substantial cultural-aesthetic ground. In his assessment, two assumptions reigned: that artworks could be made imperishable and that "great works" should and would naturally survive.[368] In this instance, immortality references the artwork's continuing physical existence. We have already explored the complex factors that render this longevity problematic. However, Schwartz's characterization of the "immortality of art" is narrow and thus unnecessarily limited; it is focused primarily on physical perdurance as the defining factor. Yet this is not the only sense in which the immortality of art has been (or even might be) understood. The definitions above suggest that there are aspects of immortality, which also include things that are intangible. Therefore, if we broaden

[365] Similarly, in some non-Western cultures the creation of an enduring object is not always a primary aesthetic goal. Alfred Gell draws attention to the performative aspect of Malakuan sand drawings, whereby expertise in their manner of construction was more important than the product, which would disappear with the tide. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1998) 7, 90, 93.

[366] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "immortal," 2a, accessed July 7, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91968?redirectedFrom=immortal&.

[367] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "immortality," 2, accessed July 7, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91969?redirectedFrom=immortality&.

[368] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 72-74.

our understanding of the "immortality of art" to include other manifestations of endurance—manifestations which resonate with our experiences of and practices concerning art—it becomes apparent that the perception of aesthetic immortality is not entirely without merit.

How then, if at all, does art's finitude intersect with the eternal? In what sense can works of art be considered immortal? How is immortality expressed through the preservation of art? There are three primary modes through which art expresses immortality, each with a unique telos: individual, displaced, and intimated. The first, "individual immortality", is concerned with the permanence or endurance of the artwork itself. Accordingly, the work manifests its own immortality: it is itself imperishable or eternally enduring. In the second, "displaced immortality", the work provides surrogate existence or immortality to something else—an individual, a period, or a culture. In the third, "intimated immortality", art is a window to immortality outside itself: the work points to or embodies immortality other than its own. The three, while significantly different in orientation, are not unrelated—and not wholly divorced from Schwartz's original material concerns. Indeed, the realization of the first (individual immortality) is usually necessary to achieve the second (displaced immortality). Thus, there is often overlap between these three manifestations of immortality. Two questions reveal the telos of each: What is preserved? Why is it preserved?

V. a. Individual Immortality: The Artwork's Permanence

We have already considered some of the efforts to mitigate or eliminate the degradation of artistic works; their main goal is to ensure the artwork's longevity or permanence. Although physical imperishability is an acknowledged impossibility, ongoing efforts to counter effects of material degradation through interventative conservation or alternative preservation attest that the work's individual immortality in some form is still the aim or desire of many. The "reasons for conservation" are varied, but, generally, the work's persistence is pursued in order to retain that which makes it meaningful or valuable to groups or individuals.[369] Indeed, considerable research and publications are devoted to understanding and addressing the dangers a work may encounter in hopes that these may be avoided. In this regard, the mortality

[369] Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 175.

of art is seen as something to overcome or, at the very least, to significantly delay. Although the provisional nature of this immortality is not entirely ignored, conservation (by definition) seeks not to embrace the natural termination of a work but to develop ways to avoid it. Indeed, preservation is the explicit role of the conservator.[370] As a result, conservation research is directed toward responding to existing challenges as well as anticipating future ones, since threats to the longevity of artifacts will likely only increase.[371] In this vein, the Canadian Conservation Institute's "Framework for Preservation of Museum Collections" was created to assist museums in becoming more effective in assessing and addressing *all* potential sources of risk;[372] it is an exhaustive chart, which covers not only obvious threats such as "Direct Physical Forces" and "Thieves, Vandals, Displacers", but the invisible ones as well, including "Radiation" and "Incorrect Relative Humidity".[373]

Yet an artwork's permanence does not always require the perdurance of its original physical form. Works of conceptual art, which are based on ideas that need not be materially manifested or may be manifested in multiple iterations, exist and endure not necessarily as physical objects but, indirectly, through certificates and other forms of documentation used for transferring ownership.[374] For this reason, collector Agnes Gund expressed no distress when a Sol LeWitt "chalk drawing was literally washed off the wall" after a steam pipe burst because, as she explained, "the piece is based on an 'idea' described in a certificate by the artist and can be re-created at will."[375] As an "idea" the work is seemingly impossible to destroy—as long as the idea remains transferable or knowable in some way. As Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens describe, in conceptual art's "radically distinctive […] ontology […] the physical object is presented to us *merely* as a means to appreciating the work, rather than as a medium in the full-blooded sense."[376] Hence, the work exists as an "idea" apart from any material form and is therefore not dependent on such, except as our

[370] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 183.

[371] Hence, the final section in Caple's *Preventative Conservation in Museums* highlights future issues that conservation will likely need to address, including those caused by climate change. Chris Caple, "The History of and an Introduction to Preventative Conservation," in Caple, *Preventative Conservation in Museums*, 543-70.

[372] Charlie Costain, "Framework for Preservation of Museum Collections," in Caple, *Preventative Conservation in Museums*, 23.

[373] Ibid., 27-38.

[374] Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 15-16.

[375] Gund, "Art Ecosystem," 124.

[376] Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens, *Who's Afraid of Conceptual Art?* (London: Routledge, 2010), 70.

ability to perceive it requires a means by which to do so.[377] The eternity of LeWitt's aesthetic creation, therefore, lies not in the permanence of a unique drawing made by the artist, but in a transferable piece of paper, which carries instructions for the work's recreation.[378] In fact, LeWitt insists that his drawings should not be preserved as autographic "artifacts" but "redrawn" to erase any marks of degradation.[379] (Material mortality, it seems, compromises the apprehension of the immortal purity of the idea.) Thus, as Buskirk's observation suggests, the certificate is the enduring tangible evidence of the immaterial work; she states: "it [the certificate] can represent the continuous existence of an idea that does not have an ongoing physical presence; and it can describe a work not yet made that can be realized on the basis of the certificate."[380] Of course only certain manifestations of the idea are legitimate: the instructions, which the certificate contains, delineate the boundaries of authenticity. Similarly, even for those non-conceptual works whose perdurance is achieved through replication (either entirely remade or just individual components replaced) authenticity still requires the boundaries within which the work retains its meaning and identity to be thoughtfully and deliberately determined.[381] Although Dykstra is concerned with the relationship between artist intentions and preservation of non-conceptual works—works which *are* affected by material change—his assertions also introduce the possibility that a materially manifested work could be understood to exist imperishably in a non-physical realm—here delineated as "psychological":

> Because physical artworks are the primary grounds for representing artist's intentions, a paradox occurs: physical materials decay, but artists' purposes, aims, goals, and objectives exist in a psychological arena where they do not decompose or deteriorate. Eventually and inevitably artists' materials lose fidelity in their allegiance and attachment to the artist's intentions. Recognition of physical decay or damage invites questions about the materials' reference to the artist's intent.[382]

Likewise, David Grattan and R. Scott William suggest that artworks possess a bifurcated existence or "two kinds of life: that of the concept (the meaning) and that of the materials. As an object ages, it changes; ultimately, the disintegration of the

[377] Ibid., 60.
[378] Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 45.
[379] Ibid., 45-46.
[380] Ibid., 53.
[381] See discussion in Laurenson, "Time-Based Media," 157-60.
[382] Dykstra, "Artist's Intentions," 200.

materials brings obliteration."[383] While the meaning of the work is enduring, material mortality renders it inaccessible. The idea and its physical manifestation may differ in respective lifespan. Dykstra reminds us of this: "Artistic achievements are not and cannot be fixed forever in the final physical result of artists' creative work."[384] Although these examples suggest that the idea of a work is immortal, one wonders how this can be confirmed—except theoretically—without the idea's conveyance through an equally enduring physical form, either original or alternative.[385]

Yet in spite of this material finitude, conservation largely invests in a counter-response to transience, suggesting that the artwork's individual immortality is still its principal aim and expectation. What underlying motives fuel this pursuit? Conservation can, of course, serve a purely practical purpose: enabling an artifact to remain in a condition accessible to viewers. However, Caple suggests that, while conservation is certainly concerned with maintaining the functionality of artifacts, the long human history of preventative conservation evidences significance apart from function, and concludes: "we always look after things we love (value)."[386] After recounting some of the diverse reasons others suggest for conservation activity, Muñoz Viñas proposes that conservation exists primarily to "preserv[e] and improv[e] the three kinds of meanings" works possess: "scientific", "social, hi-cult symbolic", and "sentimental symbolic".[387] Of course, in order to preserve that which makes a work meaningful or valuable to various groups or individuals, the artwork must both persist and be maintained in state appropriate to the needs of those who value it—a state which may be different for each interested party. For instance, a religious painting that functions as a devotional object may require restoration of the image for the sake of clarity, whereas this would not be desirable in a work valued for its historical or aesthetic history.[388]

As we have already seen in our previous discussion of value, preservation demonstrates our valuation of the work and asserts its supposedly intrinsic importance; hence, a work's lastingness—its immortality—may be seen as evidence or validation of its value. In fact, Muñoz Viñas argues that conservation's "expressive

[383] David Grattan and R. Scott Williams, "From '91' to '42': Questions of Conservation for Modern Materials," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 73.
[384] Dykstra, "Artist's Intentions," 199.
[385] Even if memory is called upon as the idea's lodging, the person is the physical form.
[386] Caple, "Preventative Conservation," 2-3.
[387] Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 171-73, 75.
[388] See ibid., 181 for more on this subject.

function"—its display of deliberate care and attention—means that a work's perceived importance may be elevated through the very act of conservation.[389] Thus, regardless of its degree of ultimate success in extending the life of a work, conservation may—by the fact of its pursuit—imbue the object with additional value.[390] Indeed, the equation of value with duration is a culturally persistent motif. Matthew Reason argues that the desire to document live performance—an intrinsically ephemeral art form—is rooted in the concern that its perceived worth will be equally fleeting: "Fear of transience, of the forgotten equating to the valueless, has long sparked a practical, social and academic urge to 'save' live performance from disappearance."[391] If the work of art does not persist in some tangible way, how can it be known or remembered? Moreover, if no memory of the work exists is its innate value diminished?

Early in the twentieth century Sigmund Freud addressed the relationship between worth and lastingness in his essay *On Transience*.[392] He observed that people responded to the anticipated eventual loss of that which is beautiful—in nature, humans, and their creations—in two ways: by resigned "despondency" or by resistance through a "demand for immortality".[393] However, Freud rejected transience as an agent of devaluation:

> I did dispute the […] view that the transience of what is beautiful involves any loss in its worth.
>
> On the contrary, an increase! Transience value is scarcity value in time. […] Nor can I understand any better why the beauty and perfection of a work of art or of an intellectual achievement should lose its worth because of its temporal limitation. A time may indeed come when the pictures and statues which we admire to-day will crumble to dust, or a race of men may follow us who no longer understand the works of our poets and thinkers, or a geological epoch may even arrive when all animate life upon the earth ceases; but since the value of all this beauty and perfection is determined only by its significance for our own emotional lives, it has no need to survive us and is therefore independent of absolute duration.[394]

Freud, who regarded death as the end of individual existence and the afterlife as compensatory fiction, was equally content to accept the ephemerality of both

[389] Ibid., 176.
[390] Ibid., 176.
[391] Reason, *Live Performance*, 21-23.
[392] Freud, "On Transience."
[393] Ibid., 305.
[394] Ibid., 305-06.

humanity's habitation and the works of art it created. In his view, the latter's present value would be in no way diminished by its future non-existence. But not all would agree, including the poet whose melancholy initially prompted Freud's reflection:[395] he was not convinced by Freud's logic—an outcome Freud attributed to the poet's inability to disengage his emotions from mourning the inevitable.[396]

In contrast, there are some whose theological explications of the nature of the New Creation are oriented in such a way that art's value is affirmed primarily by its anticipated eternal continuance. In other words, cultural activity and its fruit (or products) are worthwhile and significant because the latter will achieve a measure of immortality—that is, they will not be irrevocably destroyed—in God's final kingdom. Propositions concerning the *actual* future manifestation of this range in degree of specificity, with some expounding this in more concrete terms and others content with ambiguity. For instance, in the final proposition of his theological argument for the importance of "culture-making" David Bruce Hegeman claims:

> The most noble and excellent of culturative products will have a place in the New Jerusalem. A joyful affirmation of the future potential of man-made artifacts will lead the redeemed community to have a positive outlook on the physical creation and its development by human beings.[397]

Throughout his argument, Hegeman emphasizes continuation in physical terms, referring to these products of human activity—including the "best of our artworks"—as the anticipated "furnishings of the future city of God."[398] Similarly, Anthony Hoekema, whom Hegeman cites to support his argument, argues affirmatively from Revelation 21: 24, 26:

> Is it too much to say that, according to these verses, the unique contributions of each nation to the life of the present earth will enrich the life of the new earth? Shall we then perhaps inherit the best products of culture and art which this earth has produced?[399]

N.T. Wright makes similar claims for art's perdurance, although he allows for much more ambiguity in the actual details of this.[400] In both *Surprised by Hope* and *New*

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[395] Ibid., 305.
[396] Ibid., 306.
[397] Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, 23,85.
[398] Ibid., 88-89.
[399] Hoekema, *Bible and the Future*, 39-40, 285-286.
[400] Admittedly, this is *not* the focus of his writing in these two books, but it is an interesting inclusion nonetheless, especially for the way in which it reinforces the connection between value and permanence. His examples (music and painting) are either reproducible or recognizably static works of

Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of the Christian Hope—attempts to correct what he sees as misperceptions of heaven—Wright emphasizes the eternally enduring destiny of present human actions (more generally, but including art making) as a counter to their apparent earthly futility. Referencing 1 Corinthians 15:58 he states,

> what you do in the Lord *is not in vain*. […] You are […] accomplishing something which will become, in due course, part of God's new world. […] every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; […] all of this [including other human acts] will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation which God will one day make. God's recreation of his wonderful world […] means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last all the way into God's new world. In fact it will be enhanced there.[401]

He adds a caveat, however:

> I have no idea what precisely this will mean in practice. I am putting up a signpost, not offering a photograph of what we will find when we get to where the signpost is pointing. I don't know what musical instruments we shall have to play Bach's music, though I'm sure Bach's music will be there. […] I do not know how the painting an artist paints today in prayer and wisdom will find a place in God's new world.[402]

Wright, in particular, seeks to counter the fear that finitude—human finitude—undermines significance. He does so by arguing that the resurrection changes everything: "*the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die*. God will raise it to new life. What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it."[403] Each of these three proposals is, thus, also a response to the human experience of transience and underscores a secondary theme: lastingness is a marker of worth. While eschatological assertions such as these are, undoubtedly, held by a minority, they illustrate another way in which the individual immortality of art is expressed and imagined. As such, they uphold the link between value and perdurance, with, however, the added weight of divine valuation behind it.

Even without a consideration of eternity per se, preservation activities are still concerned with a work's future beyond the present generation, and by implication its long-term valuation. Specifically, the pattern of preservation suggests that we desire

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art. He uses no ephemeral examples (except human actions) so it is difficult to know how he would address the difficulty of art that is not intended to last.

[401] Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 219-220. (See also Wright, *New Heavens, New Earth*, 21.)

[402] Ibid.

[403] Ibid., 205.

the future to affirm a work's significance as more than a historic artifact. We want the future to validate its lasting value through its inclusion in the culture. Danto observes:

> We may hope that more adheres to conserved objects than the fact that they were ours; we may hope that, in fact, they enter the culture of the future as part of its content—the way parts of different pasts, like paintings and sculptures and written texts from earlier cultures, have come to have a meaning for us by entering our own canons and conceptions of life.[404]

This is at the heart of what Steiner describes as the artist's "wager on lastingness": a hope that the work is of such greatness that it will attain cultural immortality.[405] However, this desired outcome is only possible if the work is enabled to achieve permanence in the present. Moreover, in seeking to pass our works from one generation to the next, we gamble that their value will remain constant. Thus, the individual immortality of the work of art matters, in part, because it allows others—especially the future—the opportunity to affirm our valuation of the work and, perhaps, by proxy, ourselves. Therefore, one of the implicit concerns of preservation is the desire to ensure that the recognition of a work's value can continue.

In light of these observations, it would be interesting to extend Scheffler's thought experiment into the aesthetic arena. If we knew in advance which artworks the future would retain and which it would reject, would we alter our current practices regarding their preservation? How would conservation resources be allocated given this knowledge? Would some of these activities cease to be meaningful? Or, would we still choose to preserve those works *we* value, knowing that their "immortality" would be transient?[406]

V. b. Displaced Immortality: The Artwork as Surrogate Existence

> "In this way, you will live through your art forever."[407]

One does not usually look to a valuer to provide answers to life's existential concerns. Yet, in his advice to artists regarding the preparation of their artistic estate for after their death, Jeffrey P. Fuller, a member of the American Society of Appraisers, makes

[404] Danto, "Looking at the Future," 3.
[405] Steiner, *Grammars*, #270
[406] When Camus applies life's absurdity to aesthetic creation, permanent and ephemeral works are of equal value: "To work and create 'for nothing'". Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, 91-92.
[407] Fuller, "What Will Happen."

the statement above his closing comment.[408] Although perhaps a presumptuous assertion on his part, it nonetheless reflects one means by which a person or culture's works are perceived to mitigate the finality of human transience. Whereas mortality renders individuals—and collectively, cultures—impermanent, the relative durability of art provides an enduring, substitute existence. In this way art performs the role of surrogate, standing in for those who are not, in and of themselves, immortal. For example, Kellehear notes that among "prosperous" Romans, "will-making was an 'obsession' because wills were key ways to ensure personal immortality through the creation of memorable tombs, funerals or other public buildings."[409] In such instances, the manifestation of immortality is displaced from the person or culture to the enduring object that represents them. The memorial's surrogate role is perhaps the most recognizable; yet artworks and other artifacts often perform this function as well.

In the early twentieth century, the great number of First World War deaths provided the impetus for the creation of a national ritual and memorial that served in this representative way. As David Cannadine recounts, the unexpected and staggering loss of life during the war left Britain emotionally devastated.[410] During an age in which "children increasingly tended to outlive their parents" the war deaths decimated the hopes of "an older generation which had dared to believe that their children would live on after they themselves were dead and gone".[411] When ordinary mourning practices and ecclesial answers did not assuage the widespread and unfettered grief that swept the culture, two substitutes arose in response: spiritualism and Armistice Day.[412] While both offered meaning and comfort to the bereaved, they also provided an alterative form of permanence that acknowledged yet negated death's harsh divide.[413] Spiritualism promised continued interaction with the dead, whereas Armistice Day served as a visible (and later perpetual) reminder of their previous existence. Like the ceremony, the Cenotaph was originally intended to be a one off tribute;[414] initially constructed in wood and plaster as a temporary memorial to the

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[408] Ibid.

[409] Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 155.

[410] David Cannadine, "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981) 195.

[411] Ibid., 217.

[412] Ibid., 218-19. Obviously, spiritualism existed prior to the First World War, though according to Cannadine, interest in it grew substantially during the war.

[413] Ibid., 219, 27. Documentation of the ephemeral work performs a similar function.

[414] Ibid., 220-221.

war dead, it was replaced by an identical stone version when public response demanded more.[415] The transient marker became permanent and the ceremony, whereby the absent dead were remembered during a moment of silence, became an annual ritual.[416] Cannadine suggests that the remarkable success of the annual Armistice Day ritual lay in its ability to provide people "reassurance that their loved ones were not forgotten and that they had not died in vain."[417] Their persistence in public memory, which the ritual and physical memorial helped accomplish, served to validate their life and sacrifice. In this way, the Cenotaph functioned as the displaced immortality of those who had died: the material artifact was a tangible, perpetual substitute for their enduring "presence".

This preservative role is not exclusive to intentional memorial structures. Indeed, as Danto observes, our knowledge of various cultures exists because we possess their artifacts:[418] "[these] remains […] have an immortality not granted to the cultures themselves".[419] Consequently, the preserved work of art becomes a valued source of both information and remembrance. Clottes emphasizes this retentive aspect of rock art in his appeal for its preservation: "It is often the only concrete intelligible expression and testimony of the complexity of the thoughts, beliefs, and cults of lost indigenous civilizations."[420] Mol and Viles similarly frame the conservation of rock art by stressing its importance as a means of understanding the development of a region and its people.[421] Thus, the importance of the artifact lies, at least in part, in its ability to give "access" to persons who are no longer living; artifacts give lost cultures a form of continuing presence and secure their long-term remembrance. At the end of the twentieth century, Steiner characterized modernity as fixated on the task of keeping the smallest evidences of cultures:[422]

> The realization of the mortality of all cultures […] has generated a deep-lying anxiety. An inventory must be made, remembrance documented and

[415] Ibid., 221.
[416] Ibid., 224-26.
[417] Ibid., 226.
[418] Danto, "Looking at the Future," 3.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Clottes, "Rock Art," 1, 15.
[421] In this instance: the San People of South Africa. Mol and Viles, "Geoelectric Investigations," 280.
[422] Steiner, *Grammars*, 241.

> warehoused before it is too late […]. An obscurely felt eschatology and sense of an ending are operative.[423]

It is the recognition of encroaching finitude that adds urgency to this task, which is to secure the endurance of the one who is mortal through the surrogate immortality of the other who is not.

Yet it is not only individuals, and cultures more generally, that are the object of this concern. In the same way that past cultures are known (and understood) through their enduring artifacts, periods of aesthetic history are understood through their representative artworks. While a work of art may have singular aesthetic value, it also forms part of the larger collective body of work of an artist, a period, or an aesthetic culture; therefore, the loss of any individual work may also contribute to loss of the whole. Indeed, this point is critical to Schwartz's argument against the presumption of art's immortality. He argues that our knowledge of the aesthetic past is far more inadequate than has been acknowledged.[424] Instead, ignoring significant inventory gaps, we have foolishly cobbled together art history from only a few remaining works.[425] More positively, Grattan and Williams affirm this important relationship between art historical knowledge and the persistence of individual works. For instance, they note: "Without an attempt at preservation [of Duchamp's *Prière de Toucher*], there would be less for the Williams College students to experience, and the understanding of Duchamp and his era would be diminished."[426] Roy A. Perry makes a similar connection: "If we do not preserve the art of today for tomorrow's audience, their knowledge and experience of our culture will be, sadly, impoverished."[427] While he recognizes the clear relationship between individual works and collective history, Perry's concern for aesthetic immortality is also far more personal: the preservation of "*our* culture".[428] If what and how much we preserve determine how we are perceived by the future, then they can also ensure that we are still known and valued. Perry's use of "impoverished" reinforces this sense of *our* significance. Thus, there is an "obscurely felt eschatology" in his warning, which seeks to secure our future legacy

[423] Ibid., 242.
[424] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 72-73.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Grattan and Williams, "Questions of Conservation," 73.
[427] Roy A. Perry, "Present and Future: Caring for Contemporary Art at the Tate Gallery," in Corzo, *Mortality Immortality?*, 44.
[428] Emphasis mine.

and save us from obscurity.[429] Danto notes the careful attention given to such efforts in the West:

> It is, however, a trait distinctive of our culture that in addition to such inadvertent ruins and remnants as may survive us as a matter of chance, we deliberately endeavor to conserve a certain portion of our culture, specifically in order that the future might see us much as we see ourselves.[430]

Moreover, both Steiner and Bauman have framed and explained culture against the backdrop of human mortality. Bauman identifies the desire to undercut the finality of death as one aim of cultural activity: certain actions are given "life-transcending, immortal value", as the statement, "'He died but his work lives on'", indicates.[431] Thus, a person's work provides the needed, albeit displaced, immortality. Similarly, Steiner argues that artists in a classical culture are engaged in a "gamble on transcendence" with every act of creation.[432] Their creative effort in this "wager against mortality" is "one of ambitious sacrifice, of the obsession to outlast, to outmanoeuvre the banal democracy of death", fueled by the possibility—indeed, the ardent hope—that the work they create will ultimately achieve the enduring life of "great art".[433] Whether or not such aesthetic immortality offers consolation (or angst) to a work's mortal creator, it is a wager with no guarantees;[434] the work may, in the end, be unsuccessful and, as a result, forgotten or lost.[435]

"Displaced Immortality", therefore, is concerned primarily with the preservation of individual or cultural significance and identity. In this instance, the loss of the work of art (while a critical and necessary concern) is secondary to the loss of what it represents: the "other" it enables to endure. The immortality promised in this surrogate existence is, perhaps, another indication of our disquietude with finitude and our faith in our ability to overcome it. Indeed, Perry suggests that humanity's collecting and preserving activities are grounded in "a sense that we can influence the

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[429] Steiner's phrase: Steiner, *Grammars*, 242.
[430] Danto, "Looking at the Future," 3.
[431] Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality*, 6.
[432] Steiner, *Bluebeard's Castle*, 71.
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ibid. Steiner interprets instances of both: "Flaubert howled like a man racked at the thought that Emma Bovary – his creature, his contrivance of arrayed syllables – would be alive and real, long after he himself had gone to a painful death." In contrast, he offers, "To die at thirty-five but to have composed *Don Giovanni*, to know, as did Galois during the last night of his twenty-one-year existence, that the pages he was writing would alter the future forms of algebra and of space. Ibid.
[435] Ibid.

future as the past influences us."[436] Thus, the artwork's ongoing permanence tangibly extends the past into the future by serving as a rich record of (or surrogate for) an individual or group's existence. In this way, the artwork's contribution to culture endures and achieves, as Danto aptly states, an immortality the people themselves do not possess.[437]

V. c. Intimated Immortality: The Artwork as Window to True Immortality

Both "individual" and "displaced" immortalities require the artwork's continuance to achieve their aims. In the first, the work's value is confirmed by its endurance. In the second, persons (broadly speaking) are given quasi-immortality through the work's surrogate permanence. Yet in a materialist universe marked by finitude (the dominant view for many in the West), these immortalities can only ever be provisional. The tenuous nature of material persistence and the vagaries of valuation conspire to create a consequent fragility for either pursuit. Thus, John Carey criticizes Steiner for his apparent disregard of material reality: "No art is immortal and no sensible person could believe it was. Neither the human race, nor the planet we inhabit, nor the solar system to which it belongs will last for ever. From the viewpoint of geological time, the afterlife of any artwork is an eyeblink."[438] In such a universe, "true immortality" is impossible unless these limitations are overturned. Carey, like Freud, saw no possibility of this. Indeed, Freud was only prepared to concede relative eternity as a consolation for transience: "As regards the beauty of Nature, each time it is destroyed by winter it comes again next year, so that in relation to the length of our lives it can in fact be regarded as eternal."[439] Carey, of course, was much less accommodating. Yet only if one accepts Carey and Freud's presuppositions—and one is under no epistemological obligation to do so—must one also accept their conclusions. If human and material impermanence are unequivocally unavoidable, then the pursuit of individual and displaced immortalities certainly does seem misguided and Carey's critique rightly exposes its shortsightedness. Nevertheless, we must also insist that

[436] Perry, "Present and Future," 44.
[437] Danto, "Looking at the Future," 3.
[438] John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005) 148. Carey summarized Steiner's argument: "Without this urge for immortality in the artist, and without a corresponding sense in us that artworks partake in immortality, there can be no 'true culture'." Ibid., 147.
[439] Freud, "On Transience," 305.

artists are not entirely wrong to anticipate a *degree* of perdurance for their creations although, as Carey rightly notes, it is comparatively negligible. Our experience informs us that some works do endure as long-term objects of aesthetic reception, such as the "Mona Lisa". Thus, we recognize in art's exhibition of quasi-immortalities the *possibility* of an endurance that exceeds the limitations of our own finitude. This is evident in the way in which aesthetic meanings of works transcend time, remaining relevant for multiple generations. Indeed, Steiner insightfully observed the processes by which art transcends the limitations of historical particularity, achieving timelessness as a result of its universality or multi-valent nature, as Boas described it.[440] While acknowledging the potential vicissitudes of an artwork's continuing reception, Steiner argued, "But if they have in them sufficient life-force and insolubility, if the questions they ask of themselves and of us remain unanswerably insistent, such works re-emerge, often with redoubled impact."[441] Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Steiner would suggest that these same works, and indeed art in general, allow a taste of eternity—regardless of its actuality:

> Only two experiences enable human beings to participate in the truth-fiction, in the pragmatic metaphor of eternity, of liberation from the eradicating dictates of biological-historical time, which is to say: death. The one way is that of authentic religious beliefs for those open to them. The other is that of the aesthetic. It is the production and reception of works of art, in the widest sense, which enable us to share in the experiencing of duration, of time unbounded.[442]

This, as Steiner indicates, has its religious parallel and in this very observation lies the potential for art's dual manifestation of immortality. Therefore, while their hold on time is provisional, quasi-immortalities of art fulfill an important secondary function and need not be rejected as wholly invalid—especially if what they intimate has an actual counterpart in reality: that is, a true immortality. Thus, in art's "intimated immortality", the immortality which the work manifests is outside of itself. The work of art points to or embodies immortality other than its own. Hence, the artwork's individual immortality is, in one sense, of minimal or temporary importance. True immortality is not compromised by the artwork's inherent finitude; it may even be enhanced by it.

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[440] Boas, "Mona Lisa," 224.
[441] Steiner, *Grammars*, 213.
[442] Ibid., 214-15.

This is not an entirely new understanding of aesthetic immortality. Certain forms of art have long been regarded as mediators of other eternal realities: both icons in the Orthodox Christian tradition and Buddhist sand mandalas are seen in this way. In addition, certain images have served as powerful aesthetic analogues for the radical transformation of finitude. The mythical rebirth of the phoenix is one such symbol; it has been used in both religious and non-religious contexts to indicate a reality that supersedes the present one. Thus, for those final year students whose work was destroyed in Glasgow School of Art's 2014 fire, the school's aptly named Phoenix Bursaries signaled hope that loss would not be the final word: new life (works) would rise from the ashes.[443] (To this end, the bursary provided affected students the opportunity to create new work and redevelop their portfolios.)[444] The ancient image of the mythical phoenix reborn has also represented a relationship between death and new life that is, in its outcome, much less figurative: it was adopted in the early Christian Church as a symbol for the Resurrection.[445] In the face of both instances of seemingly total destruction, the myth of the phoenix is a powerful portrayal of death and loss undone.

In both its content and physical persistence, art can model transformative possibilities as foretastes of eschatological realities that connect to human longings, both within and without a particular religious framework. To this end, it suggests—or intimates—a reality that is different than present experience. A theological reading need not be the intent of the artist and, in fact, is often not; however, the works introduce the potential for these interpretations through their non-religious intimations of immortality. For instance (as mentioned in chapter one) the pastoral scene depicted in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is everlasting and without change: the trees will not lose their leaves; the lovers will never age. Instead, anticipation and joy are arrested at their peak; in this way, the scene's inhabitants—humans and nature—are

[443] http://gsapress.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/the-glasgow-school-of-art-announces.html Accessed February 13, 2015

[444] http://gsapress.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/the-glasgow-school-of-art-announces.html Accessed February 13, 2015 In this, students became their own agents of "rebirth".

[445] David Leeming, "Phoenix," in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford University Press, 2005), accessed February 13, 2015, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156690.001.0001/acref-9780195156690-e-1268; *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. "phoenix," ed. E. A. Livingstone (Oxford University Press, 2006), accessed February 13, 2015, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198614425.001.0001/acref-9780198614425-e-4544. Accessed February 13, 2015.

rescued from the consequences of transience, although perhaps not in the manner most would desire:

> Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
> Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
> Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
>
> Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
> Your leaves, not ever bid the Spring adieu;
> And, happy melodist, unwearied,
> For ever piping songs for ever new;
> More happy love! More happy, happy love!
> For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
> For ever panting, and for ever young;
> […]
>
> O Attic shape! […]
> When old age shall this generation waste,
> Thou shalt remain […].[446]

Beauty, youth, love, and pleasure: these are the things the urn preserves without diminishment. Keats's envious glance is rooted in the knowledge of his ephemeral fate; yet the contrasting joy of the urn's inhabitants is held only by timelessness. This pastoral immortality raises an important theological question: can the negative effects of transience only be remedied by the absence of temporality? Polkinghorne similarly asks, "whether temporality is constitutive of being truly human, an essential good and not an unfortunate deficiency."[447] Clearly, the alternative to Keats's negative mortality—as presented in the urn—lacks any of the good that change within temporality also brings: spring will never turn to summer and, thus, summer flowers will never grow; the love of the youth will never mature, nor even achieve consummation. This present world, Polkinghorne argues, was "endowed with just those physical properties that have enabled it to 'make itself' in the course of its evolving history";[448] thus, this world could only "be a world of transience in which death is the cost of a new life."[449] Yet this fact does not make time and change innately negative. He concludes that temporality "is intrinsic" to being human;

[446] Keats, *Poetry and Prose*, 461-62.
[447] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 100.
[448] Ibid., 114.
[449] Ibid.

therefore, "the new creation will not be a timeless world of 'eternity, but a temporal world whose character is everlasting."[450] Thus, while the immortality the urn depicts is evidently insufficient for retaining our full humanity, it succeeds (through Keats's eyes), at the very least, in imagining a state in which joy without negative loss is possible.

In addition, as both Bauckham and Moltmann observe, through their expression of our longings for permanence, intimated immortalities may give a foretaste of their fulfillment, and in this way, increase our "hunger" for them.[451] Noting this potential, Bauckham explores parallel presentations, in theology and art after the First World War, of the "moment" valued "not as a transition from past to future, but as some kind of experience of absolute presentness or anticipation of eternity."[452] In particular, he singles out the later works of Claude Monet as examples of the attempt to "eternalize[…] the transient" by painting water lilies or the Rouen Cathedral "in such a way as to transcend [the moment's] transience" and "enable us to indwell it as a taste of eternity".[453] In these series paintings, Monet was intent on capturing the individual "'moment of the landscape'" (or cathedral façade) whose change in appearance wrought by the light was inevitably ephemeral.[454] In each painting he omits those non-essential elements of particularity whose temporal associations would distract the viewer.[455] As a result, the subject appears without any "past or future".[456] This permits the viewer to "pause in the moment itself" and consider each painting's singular ephemerality without reference to the linear passage of time.[457] Unlike Keats's Grecian urn, which retains its temporality only as a limited, arrested progression, Monet's resulting images are "expansive" in nature.[458] As Bauckham insightfully interprets,

> Not only does the space of the *Nymphéas* [water lilies] transcend this world's space; their time transcends this world's time. By drawing us into their own space they also draw us into their own time, the transient moment which expands with looking and seems, like the surface of the water, to go on without end. The static moment of these paintings is not a moment which

[450] Ibid, 117.
[451] Bauckham, "Time, Eternity and the Arts," 30.
[452] Ibid., 7.
[453] Ibid., 7-8.
[454] Ibid., 22.
[455] Ibid., 23.
[456] Ibid.
[457] Ibid., 22-23.
[458] Ibid., 28.

> expands with its own memories of past and expectations of future. It is the moment without past or future but yet expansive, the still moment the pictures enable us to indwell. Here, if anywhere within this world, the evanescence is preserved as evanescent and given time.[459]

Again, in contrast to the urn's frozen depiction, Monet's paintings do not "seek"—in Bauckham's apt words—"a changeless eternity at furthest remove from transience" but "an eternal moment to indwell."[460] In this way, its evanescence is both preserved and valued.[461]

As we have already explored, the innate transience of works of art, which results from material finitude, frequently evokes a counter-response to which conservation is handmaiden. However, at least in content, this has not always been the primary approach to finitude: death and transience have, at times, been given greater prominence. Thus, in the tradition of vanitas paintings, symbols of mortality—including objects whose transient nature was readily apparent—served to remind viewers to consider their fate in kind.[462] Alongside other items, "burning candles, soap bubbles, and flowers" provided apt metaphors for the brevity and fragility of human existence as well as its earthly endeavors.[463] While the medium of paint provided these transient representations an elusive moment of eternity, the message firmly imbedded in their depiction was one of somber warning: memento mori. Buskirk suggests that the unusual longevity of Gober's preserved donuts "evoke[s] the *vanitas* theme" by "remind[ing] viewers of the transience that would usually be their [the donuts'] fate".[464] However, it also offers the possibility of an alternative reading: one in which their "peculiar permanence" evokes the opposite, by suggesting to viewers that transience may be overcome and, thus, immortality is possible.[465]

A critical difference between Gober's sculpture and the vanitas paintings is the relationship between the medium and the objects represented. Gober's *Bag of Donuts* is, literally, a bag of donuts. In contrast, the soap bubble or flowers in the paintings are only *images* of the actual objects, not the objects themselves. Although the bubble

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[459] Ibid.

[460] Ibid., 24.

[461] Bauckham writes: "Evanescent nature becomes in his work a kind of dream-world of sensuous abundance, tranquillity and harmony, snatched from disappearance into the past and preserved in its very evanescence. In mediating transience and permanence his paintings also mediate the real and the desired." Ibid.

[462] *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "vanitas."

[463] Ibid.

[464] Buskirk, *Contingent Object,* 149.

[465] Ibid.

never bursts and the flowers never fully decay, the viewer recognizes that the objects' unchanging state is an illusion: a product of the medium of presentation and not a reflection of reality. The objects remain, *in reality*, examples of persistent transience and the inevitability of death. The unchanging state of Gober's donuts, however, is not illusory: they, in actuality, do not degrade. This stands in stark contrast to that which the viewer already knows and experiences as true of reality: ordinarily, donuts decay. Hence, this startling departure from the norm opens the door to counter-vanitas readings of the donuts' unusual perdurance.

How else might the viewer interpret this unexpected imperishability? What hopes do these intimations of immortality raise? One, they anticipate a future in which humans achieve their desired immortality: that is, humans will eventually possess the capacity to master everything that limits them, including death.[466] Two, the transfigured donuts function as a sign of a future eschatological reality: they point to a time in which "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay" through divine action.[467] We shall take these in turn.

Although the myth of unchecked progress—of man's growing triumph over nature—has lost much of its early rose-colored optimism, it has never entirely disappeared. Gober rightly expected that a conservator could accomplish his desired "forever". And generally speaking, conservation, while realistic about its chances for success, still pursues the impossible, ever hopeful that new solutions to degradation will yet appear on the horizon. The relationship between medicine and mortality has followed a similar path, with technology picking up the baton where medicine falls short. For instance, digital immortality has been introduced as another potential option for humans and has been hypothetically explored in films such as *Transcendence* (2014);[468] it is, of course, already put in practice for artworks.

Some question the wisdom of heroic or indiscriminate efforts to stave off death and decay. "At what cost?" Zugazagoitia asks regarding the preservation of a

[466] As we have already seen, for some this is a current expectation. Davies states: "We live at the beginning of an age of scientific development whose knowledge of genetics, for example, is likely to change key paradigms of health expectations. Not only will distressing diseases become curable but even now some geneticists are talking with a degree of realistic anticipation of the possibility of human life being extended by considerable periods of time. It is also not inconceivable to think of the human constitution as capable of avoiding death, just as with some other forms of biological life since, 'at the organism level, there are no physiological or thermodynamic reasons why death must occur'." Davies, *Theology of Death*, 171. Even when death is acknowledged as inevitable, there is greater expectation that at the very least "the timing of death can be controlled." Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 244.

[467] Romans 8:21 (NIV)

[468] Magerstädt, *Science Fiction Cinema*, 47-49.

work of art.[469] It is a thought equally echoed in regard to human life.[470] Notably, Leonard (*Strange Fruit*), who shared Gober's able conservator, chose to mirror, rather than negate or transcend, the experience of loss resulting from death and decay. Thus, as an example of unmodified transience, Leonard's work more readily evokes the theme of vanitas than Gober's does. Indeed, the museum in which Leonard's work is housed offers this very reading:

> For as long as it lasts, the presence of the piece in the Museum provides a powerful contemporary example of the venerable tradition of *vanitas* paintings, meditations on the transience of life that usually portray fruit ready to decay, candles soon to gutter out, or flowers about to fade. *Strange Fruit* removes art from the fiction of a heroic "forever" and brings us closer to human experience where everything is changing or dying in some way but where beauty and creativity still flourish.[471]

This is not to say that Gober intended this first reading of his work in regard to the human capacity to transcend finitude or achieve immortality. However, his conservation actions implicitly reinforce or allow for this possibility. In fact, he stipulated that the bag, which contains the donuts, could be replaced with a new one if it showed any signs of degradation: a decision that further ensures the work's pristine and unchanging appearance.[472] Furthermore, because the donuts' unusual state of preservation signals an anomalous relationship to the natural order of things, it must be accounted for in some way. Although theirs is only a quasi-immortality—and thus only a temporary alteration of material norms—the radically transformed nature of the donuts still suggests that reality *could be* other than the way it always has been.

Yet this new state need not only be the result of human pursuit, as in the first reading: a second reading, which finds theological significance in their anomalous and unexpected persistence, is also possible. When viewed from a religious perspective, the transfigured donuts function as a sign of a future eschatological reality: they point

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[469] Zugazagoitia, "Michel Delacroix's Melting Plot," xiv.

[470] As Kellehear notes, various methods of "timing" one's death are the means by which a "'living death'" is avoided: "Advanced directives, DNR orders and some suicides can be seen as examples of the rise in interest and anxiety over timing death in modern industrial contexts. All these strategies are designed to undermine or to outright avoid a shameful situation of 'living death' – a set of circumstances where a dying person is repeatedly brought back from death, is kept in a biological space between living and dying, or where failed medical interventions leave the ageing or dying person vulnerable to an indefinite period of nursing home or life support care." Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 247.

[471] As quoted on Philadelphia Museum of Art, "Twentieth Century Painting and Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art," accessed February 2, 2015, http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/92277.html.

[472] Buskirk, *Contingent Object*, 147, 49.

to a future world that no longer operates under the tyranny of death and decay—but as a result of divine, not human, action. In this way, the viewer is also invited to imagine a changed relationship to her own mortality. This is, of course, the vision of the future woven throughout the New Testament.

The gospels are themselves replete with similar signals, foretastes of the promised transformation, which will end the reign of death and usher in a new reality, one which is both continuous and discontinuous with everything previous: the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-43) and Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21-24, 35-43), the encounter with Elijah, Moses, and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-11), and the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (Matthew 28; John 20; Luke 24). Moltmann writes:

> In the context of biblical interpretations, Jesus' healings are "miracles of the kingdom". In the daybreak colours of the new creation of all things, they are really not miracles at all; they are that which is then bound to come. […] But in the framework of hope for the coming of God and his kingdom, Jesus' healings become inextinguishable reminders of this future.
>
> Just as severe illnesses are fore-tokens of death, we can understand Jesus' healings of the sick as fore-tokens too. They foreshadow the resurrection and eternal life. It is only when this frail, mortal life is reborn to a life that is eternal and will not pass away that what Jesus did for the sick and possessed in his own time will be completed.[473]

Viewed in this way—as a symbolic, visual embodiment of this future state of affairs––the donuts inadvertently become a reminder, not of mortality, but of the transformation that awaits humanity in the eschaton: a radically new reality in which "'Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'"[474] Thus, this second reading is rooted in the theological anticipation of alteration to the usual patterns of transience: a representation of which, although unintended, Gober's unusual donuts readily supply.

VI. Conclusions

As we have seen, our approach to the mortality and immortality of art cannot be divorced from similar human concerns. Art is a medium through which human significance is mediated and our response to its finitude reflects this. Indeed, the

[473] Moltmann, *In the End*, 65.
[474] Rev. 21:4 (NRSV); see also 3-5.

reasons for art's creation, valuation, and preservation are interwoven with our desire to find meaning in the midst of finitude. The quasi-personification of art contributes to its surrogate importance for human continuity as well as ontological complexity regarding its endurance. Moreover, the religious or non-religious framework through which the world is viewed shapes the approach to and understanding of a work's persistence.

Yet it is art's capacity for relative perdurance in relation to the brevity of human existence that has also led to expectations for its immortality, both as an individual work of art and as a replacement for someone or something else. In the West, the equation of perdurance with value is reflected in the desire for art's permanence and expressed through art's individual and displaced immoralities. A third expression of aesthetic immortality concerns its capacity to facilitate aesthetic experiences of the eternal, either through embodying or signaling alternative realities. Intimated immortality, therefore, is art's capacity to connect human longings for continuity with the possibility of their fulfilment.

As we have noted, not all cultures or artists seek aesthetic permanence. Hence, we suggested that something additional might be gained through an acceptance of finitude, which is not possible otherwise. In the Japanese aesthetic of impermanence this approach to aesthetic transience offered consolation through identification with the human situation. In the next chapter, we will consider the mortality and immortality of art in the context of *certain* aesthetic finitude—that is, those instances in which the artwork's transience is consciously embraced through the creation of ephemeral art. In such works, how are the mortality and immortality of art held in tension and what does that tension reveal?

Chapter 3

Ephemeral Art: Aesthetic Finitude

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter we examined those factors that contribute to the general manifestation of finitude in art and the efforts to forestall, circumvent, or mitigate the undesirable consequences of aesthetic mortality. We also explored art's capacity to manifest immortality in three ways: in itself, as a surrogate for the immortality of another, and as a window to immortality outside of itself. Now we turn to examine a particular form of aesthetic finitude in which transience, loss, and disappearance is the core of its aesthetic nature: ephemeral art.

While all works of art are, as a result of natural processes of degradation and loss, ultimately and inevitably ephemeral, there are works that, by genre, medium, or intention, we recognize to be in possession of a markedly evanescent nature.[1] The media and genre of such works can vary widely, but it is their impermanence that earns them the categorization as ephemeral.[2] Some artistic practices are longstanding and familiar members: live performance has long been defined by its ephemerality. Matthew Reason aptly describes the complexity of its characteristic transience:

> One of the most prominent and recurring definitions of live performance – whether of theatre, performance art, dance or music – is that it is fundamentally ephemeral. More than simply being short-lived or lacking permanency, ephermality [sic] describes how performance ceases to be at the same moment as it becomes.[3]

However, ephemerality is not confined to works of performance; aesthetic objects may also be ephemeral, created with the intention or expectation that their existence will be temporary. While ephemeral art is not an entirely new artistic practice, in recent decades it has become more common as artists increasingly incorporate transience into their aesthetic agenda. In these instances, art's finitude is staged; that

[1] O'Neill also acknowledges this: O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art," 88.

[2] As O'Neill notes, the term "ephemeral" is often used synonymously for "temporary" or impermanent works. O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art," 88. This may also include those works that disappear and reappear, manifesting change and loss in a cycle of replenishment, such as Gonzales-Torres's candy spills. However, I will limit my discussion of ephemeral works to those whose impermanence is permanent.

[3] Reason, *Live Performance*, 1.

is, the temporary nature of a work's existence—that is, its temporal limitation—is brought to the viewer's attention, rather than hidden or denied through preventative conservation. This "staged" ephemerality results from the artist's conscious decision to use perishable materials or to enter into circumstances that facilitate a work's disappearance. In contrast to those works whose ephemerality is revealed over time and is not the intention of the artist, the aesthetic finitude of ephemeral art is the result of the artist's deliberate choices.

There are many reasons why artists create ephemeral works. For some, impermanence is one means by which to protest the commodization of art.[4] For others, aesthetic finitude is used to mirror and reflect upon ordinary human experiences of temporality and finitude. Judith Schachter and Stephen Brockman note that aesthetic impermanence may also enable artists to engage with "pressing social or political issues" in their work, as it did Gonzales-Torres: "a gay male artist who die[d] of AIDS in 1996, [and who] used ephemerality and impermanence in his art in order to confront the ephemerality and impermanence of human life itself." O'Neill has devoted particular attention to examining the works of artists, such as Gonzales-Torres and Leonard, for whom "ephemerality is a means of communicating mourning and of bearing witness to the obsessive remembering" that accompanies the grieving process.[5] Moreover, artists who knowingly use materials that are intrinsically ephemeral, usually do so for specific aesthetic reasons: these media choices are integral, rather than incidental, to their aesthetic aims. For this reason, these artists do not try to circumvent the innate transience of their media—as Gober did with his *Bag of Donuts*—by artificially altering their natural properties. Instead, they accept and exploit the limitations of their materials, sometimes allowing change and disappearance to be part of a work's "performance".

Because the ephemeral work's finitude is notable, it naturally raises questions about aesthetic immortality and the work's capacity for persistence. Moreover, it also raises the issue of value. For a culture in which permanence is often a marker of high valuation, what is the value of the ephemeral? For those concerned with the preservation of art, ephemeral art's finitude is problematic: How does one preserve a work that is meant to disappear? Are alternative forms of preservation, such as

[4] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate, 2005), 42; O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art," 88.

[5] O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art," 88.

documentation, successful surrogates: do they sufficiently counter the physical loss of the work so that ongoing aesthetic encounter remains possible? Is the pursuit of permanence contra-indicated by the work's aesthetic aims? Does its singular value require finitude? The active nature of the conservation conversation, suggests there are few, if any, definitive answers to these questions. Nevertheless, an examination of ephemeral art practice and their companion preservation strategies should deepen our understanding of the human response to finitude and the nature of finitude itself. We will, therefore, briefly explore the history of ephemeral art practices before we turn to an examination of two types of ephemerality in more detail.

II. A Brief History of Ephemeral Art in Modern and Contemporary Practice

In one sense, the creation of temporary works of art is nothing new, although it has certainly become more common in contemporary practice. Arnold Herstand observed: "There is a history going back thousands of years of artists doing temporary events. That kind of tradition is often forgotten about."[6] Sarah Bonnemaison and Christine Macy describe the longstanding practice of ephemeral festival architecture: temporary "works [such as triumphal arches] commissioned by rulers to celebrate and proclaim their reign."[7] In recognition of their cultural importance, these festival events were extensively documented; as a result, details of these temporary architectural works survive in "written records […] etchings and broadsheets", although their accuracy is sometimes questionable.[8] Even the practice of preserving ephemeral works (through documentation) is not unique to our time. However, ephemeral art has been manifest in new forms since earlier centuries and sometimes artists have not desired these works' preservation.

The mid-twentieth century witnessed the beginning of a new art form known as "Happenings". Launched in 1959 with artist Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, these forerunners of performance art were singular events that, although "structure[d]" and "scripted", were very different from traditional theatre;[9] they were without "plot or character development" and were not created with any intention of

[6] In Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 171-72.

[7] Sarah Bonnemaison and Christine Macy, eds. *Festival Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 1.

[8] Ibid., 2

[9] Glimcher, *Happenings*, 8, 11.

repeat performances.[10] Instead, these unique collaborations of sound, diverse physical objects, performers, and viewer participants "disappeared after they were performed".[11] For Kaprow, their finite existence was intended to be permanent; according to Mildred Glimcher, he "did not want the Happenings preserved. They were meant to be fleeting and non-repeatable, like life."[12] Indeed, Evelyn McElroy writes of her husband Robert's extensive documentary photographs of that time: "If not for [him], there would be no evidence that the Happenings ever happened."[13]

As the century progressed, additional forms of aesthetic ephemerality were introduced. Works of auto-destructive art, an aesthetic genre first articulated by Gustav Metzger in his 1959 manifesto, participate in their own dissolution.[14] In some of Metzger's early auto-destructive (or, self-destructing) works, panels of nylon fabric were painted with acid, which caused deterioration usually within twenty minutes.[15] Similarly, Jean Tinguely's kinetic sculpture *Homage to New York* took just thirty minutes to destroy itself in New York's Museum of Modern Art garden in 1960.[16] Tinguely described his work as:

> an attempt to liberate myself from the material. […] What was important to me was that afterwards there would be nothing, except what remained in the minds of a few people, continuing to exist in the form of an idea. […] The next day they just swept up and every trace was gone. […] It wasn't the idea of a machine committing suicide that fascinated me; it was the freedom that belonged to its ephemeral aspect – ephemeral like life, you understand. It was the opposite of the cathedrals, the opposite of the skyscrapers around us, the opposite of the museum idea, the opposite of the petrifaction in a fixed work of art.[17]

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[10] Ibid., 8-9, 11.

[11] Ibid., 11. Claire Bishop notes that in both Kaprow's *Happenings* and *Environments* "the viewer [w]as an organic part of the overall work." Bishop, *Installation Art*, 24.

[12] Glimcher, *Happenings*, 9.

[13] Evelyn McElroy, "Robert R. McElroy," in Glimcher, Mildred. *Happenings: New York, 1958-1963*, and Photography by Robert R. McElroy (New York: Monacelli, 2012), 302.

[14] Metzger, Gustav. "*Damaged Nature, Auto-Destructive Art"* (London: Coracle @ workfortheeyetodo, 1996), 59-60. His subsequent London March 10, 1960 manifesto states: "Auto-destructive art is art which contains within itself an agent which automatically leads to its destruction within a period of time not to exceed twenty years."

[15] Clive Philpot, "Gustav Metzger Chronology and Bibliography," in *"Damaged Nature, Auto-destructive Art"* (London: Coracle @ workfortheeyetodo, 1996), 86, 88.

[16] From the 1960 Press Release: MOMA, no. 27. March 18, 1960, accessed April 28, 2015. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/2634/releases/MOMA_1960_0033_27.pdf?2010.

[17] As quoted in Michael Landy, "Homage to Destruction," *Tate Etc*. 17 (Autumn 2009), *Tate*, accessed April 27, 2015, http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/homage-destruction.

For Metzger, auto-destructive art, simultaneously reflected and protested what he saw as the unceasingly destructive bent of modern society:[18] such art was "an attack on capitalist values and the drive to nuclear annihilation."[19] Indeed, Metzger asked whether it was appropriate for artists to make permanent works given the direction in which civilization was headed.[20] Auto-destructive art's impermanence could thus both "mirror […] reality" and "boycott" the dominant cultural value system, especially of those persons or institutions whom Metzger held "responsible" for the world's dire situation.[21]

In the late twentieth century, installation art—another frequently temporary art form—rose to institutional prominence.[22] An immersive and site-responsive art form, installations require the "literal presence of the viewer" in order for a work's spatial, aural, tactile, visual, or even olfactory properties to be experienced.[23] Without such, the work is often considered compromised or unfinished. For instance, in *Lichtwand* 2000, a wall of thousands of flashing light bulbs generates intense heat, light, and noise and is "designed to dislocate and disorient" the viewer.[24] According to the artist Carsten Höller, without the interplay of person and "'machine'" the work has no "'meaning'";[25] it cannot exist in isolation. It is, as Claire Bishop describes, "incomplete" without the viewer's "direct participation".[26] Both site and viewer are critical aesthetic components of the aesthetic practice and contribute to a work's limited or contingent existence.

While permanent installations are certainly possible, Marina Pugliese observes that this "artistic practice, by its very nature will tend to the ephemeral."[27] Since the

[18] Metzger, "*Damaged Nature*," 49.
[19] From June 23, 1961 manifesto: ibid., 60.
[20] Ibid., 49.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Bishop, Installation Art, 8.
[23] Ibid., 6.
[24] Ibid., 48.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Marina Pugliese, "A Medium in Evolution: A Critical History of Installations," in *Ephemeral Monuments: History and Conservation of Installation Art*, eds. Barbara Ferrriani and Marina Pugliese (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2013), 23. As I have indicated, not every installation will be temporary, just as not every painting will be permanent, although a tendency toward one or the other is more typical for each genre. There are exceptions: Walter De Maria's *New York Earth Room*—3,600 square feet of a Manhattan loft filled 22 inches deep with soil—has been in existence for almost four decades, occupying the same space since its creation in 1977. Dia Art Foundation, "Walter De Maria, *The New York Earth Room*," accessed May 13, 2016, http://www.diaart.org/sites/page/52/1365.

art form's early development in the 1960s, site-specificity, in addition to viewer participation, has been a major contributor to its transience.[28] As Bishop explains,

> instead of making a self-contained object, artists began to work in specific locations, where the entire space was treated as a single situation into which the viewer enters. The work of art was then dismantled, and often destroyed as soon as this period of exhibition was over.[29]

Barbara Ferriani notes that such loss was not always a conscious choice by the artist, but often occurred for secondary reasons: "limited space, the cost of conservation, […] or simply lack of interest […] once the circumstances that had given life to the works had come to an end."[30] These factors remain significant: many contemporary installations are created with the expectation that they will be temporary—even a singular experience. Indeed, they often could not be otherwise. In 2005, the collaborative installation *Journey* was constructed in rented studio and exhibition space on the seventh floor of a building in lower Manhattan (New York City) and incorporated, among other media, approximately 1700 square feet of turf, draped fabric, video projection, and bare light bulbs suspended above the grass floor.[31] Not only did the un-watered grass quickly begin to decompose in the summer heat, but the 28 artists involved in the work's creation dispersed to their homes across Europe and the United States soon after the exhibition ended and the rented space was returned to its owners after being restored to its original condition. The work was documented in video and photographs and the installation materials were disassembled and recycled. These combined factors make replication of the work impossible; of course, as is often the case with installation art, none was ever intended.

Similarly, the re-use of a specific location as a site for multiple installations naturally limits any individual work's lifespan. The Tate Modern has hosted a series of Unilever-sponsored temporary installations in a single space: their enormous Turbine Hall.[32] In 2003, it was the site of Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* in which the entirety of the hall was filled with the hazy, subdued light of the

[28] Bishop, *Installation Art*, 10.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Barbara Ferriani, "How to Pass on an Idea," in Ferriani and Pugliese, *Ephemeral Monuments*, 97.
[31] This section reflects the author's personal participation in the 2005 TriBCA Arts Project collaboration of which *Journey* was the result.
[32] Tate, "Unilever Series," *Tate*, accessed May 20, 2016, http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibitionseries/unilever-series.

installation's artificial sun and fog.[33] During its period of exhibition, museum visitors responded to the work by lying down on the hall floor as if it were a great expanse of grass beneath the summer sun.[34] Three years later, Turbine Hall became the location for Höller's *Test Site*: several enclosed slides through which people could experience the "simultaneous delight and anxiety" of travelling from the heights of the hall's space to its ground floor.[35] Works such as these have more than an incidental relationship to space they inhabit; when the space is "removed" the work also disappears.[36] In addition, they critically rely upon the presence of an embodied viewer since knowledge of the work is, to a significant degree, experiential. Mark Windsor argues that *Test Site* "must not be understood as an object but as a platform of interaction";[37] this is consistent, he suggests, with Höller's understanding of "people's experience as […his] 'raw material'".[38] If a viewer's presence is considered integral to a work, then the impossibility of "inhabiting" the work once it is dismantled suggests that alternative preservation methods, such as documentation, are significantly limited in what they can accomplish. To what extent can an installation that is constructed around viewer participation be grasped or understood without experiencing it personally? In her historical analysis of the art form, Bishop acknowledges this limitation:

> The way in which installation art structures such a practical and direct relationship with the viewer is reflected in the process of writing about such a work. It becomes apparent that it is difficult to discuss pieces that one has not experienced first-hand: in most cases, you had to be there.[39]

In recent decades, artists have also created works of environmental art that are ephemeral as a result of their inherently impermanent materials. In these instances, the work's medium dictates its short existence—a duration which can vary in relation to the specific characteristics of both the setting and the materials. Fung's 2004 and 2006

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[33] Ferriani, "Pass on an Idea," 72-74; Bishop, *Installation Art*, 77.

[34] Both the author's first hand experience and Bishop's observation: ibid., 77.

[35] Tate, "The Unilever Series: Casten Höller: Test Site," *Tate*, accessed June 3, 2015, http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series-carsten-holler-test-site.

[36] In some instances, a work could be re-installed to another location, although adaptations might be necessary to accommodate the new site's new physical parameters. The degree to which these are regarded as significantly altering the work depends upon the specific relationship of the installation to its original site.

[37] Mark Windsor, "A Theoretical Examination of Carsten Höller's Test Site," *Tate Papers*, no. 15, *Tate*, accessed June 5, 2015, http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/15/art-of-interaction-a-theoretical-examination-of-carsten-holler-test-site.

[38] Holler as quoted in ibid.

[39] Bishop, *Installation Art*, 10.

iterations of *The Snow Show* both used the same transient media;[40] however, the warmer climate of Torino, Italy required the artist and architect partnerships to "make [greater] allowance for the ephemeral qualities of their material" since the snow and ice would melt more quickly than it had in the previous exhibition setting of Lapland.[41] Thus the same factors that render media impermanent can also be used to advantage by thoughtful incorporation. In July of 1989, Goldsworthy exhibited 18 large snowballs in Glasgow's Old Museum of Transport;[42] in this instance their ephemeral *performance* consisted of a five-day process of melting that exposed their interior content of pine needles, stones, soil or other materials, as the frozen water melted and evaporated.[43]

As we have already seen in the case of Leonard, ephemeral media choices sometimes reflect the artist's perspective on human or aesthetic finitude, or mortality and immortality, more generally. For some artists, naturally occurring changes in media also illustrate processes they consider to be aesthetically meaningful as well as socially or ethically instructive. Environmental artist Martin Hill creates ephemeral sculptures from natural materials, sometimes in remote locations.[44] These are photographed and fine art prints are sold to collectors.[45] His choice of materials (wood, leaves, stone, ice, etc.) and ephemeral practices reflect his undergirding philosophy, which situates humanity *within* nature and advocates sustainability as an ethical imperative:

> I work in nature because we are nature…
>
> My materials come from the earth to which they return…
>
> Learning to live by nature's design is our only hope for the future[46]
>
> For me making this body of work is my way of connecting with nature to tell the story of the transition that is underway now towards a circular economy that emulates the way nature works.[47]

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[40] Lance M. Fung, "The Snow Show Torino – Exhibition Description," *Fung Collaboratives*, Accessed February 27, 2012, http://www.fungcollaboratives.org/projects/past/the-snow-show-torino/description/.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 116, 119, 120-123.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Hill uses similar media to Goldsworthy: such as wood, leaves, stone, and ice. See images: Martin Hill, *Martin Hill – Environmental Artist*. Accessed April 28, 2015, http://martin-hill.com/.

[45] For example: Martin Hill, "Fine Line Project," *Martin Hill – Environmental Artist*, accessed May 19, 2016, http://martin-hill.com/projects/the-fine-line/.

[46] Hill, *Martin Hill – Environmental Artist*.

For Hill, his works—their material origins and consequent participation in natural cycles of decay—reflect the cyclically sustainable processes of nature that he advises humanity to adopt. Indeed, he considers humanity's (and perhaps the earth's) continuing existence—"our only hope for the future"—contingent on its decision to embrace rather than resist them. In this way, a broader perdurance is found by working in conjunction with, rather than against, certain aspects of finitude.

Although Hill delineates between "ephemeral sculptures" and "[permanent] sculptures" on his website gallery, all his works model this philosophy. (The non-ephemeral sculptures sometimes utilize steel in their construction, which contributes to greater durability and permanence, albeit only temporarily.) Thus, even in a brief comment referencing the commissioned sculpture *The Visitor* (a two-meter high, steel-framed silhouette of a person made from sections of small logs), Hill emphasizes the transitory and dependent character of human existence. He remarks: "We spend our lives as visitors on earth."[48] Through his use of inherently impermanent materials, Hill tangibly demonstrates this perspective for the viewer. Given his stated aesthetic intentions, it is unlikely Hill would ever choose to alter the innate qualities of his medium in the way that Gober did. Although the original works' accessibility to viewers is limited, their individual impermanence serves a greater purpose than would any artificial permanence.

While the use of perishable materials is often the cause of a work's transience, the artist's aesthetic intentions may also override those material properties of non-perishable media that would naturally allow the work to achieve permanence if left undisturbed. If Tinguely's *Homage to New York* had simply been a static sculpture, many of its component parts—including "bicycle wheels", "an enameled bathtub", "a meteorological trial balloon", and "bottles" among other objects—would have provided the durability needed for long-term display.[49] Hence, some works are intentionally, rather than intrinsically, ephemeral: they are exhibited for a certain period of time and then dismantled or, as in the case of Tinguely's work, self-destructed. Fung's *The Snow Show* exhibitions were temporary primarily as a result of the transient nature of their media; his *Nonuments*, however, were temporary by

[47] Martin Hill, "About," *Martin Hill – Environmental Artist*, accessed April 28, 2015, http://www.martinhill.fluid.net.nz/about/art-practice/.

[48] Martin Hill, "The Visitor," *Martin Hill – Environmental Artist*, accessed May 1, 2015, http://martin-hill.com/work/sculptures/the-visitor-2/.

[49] From a New York Museum of Modern Art 1960 Press release: MOMA, no. 27.

design. Fung was one of five curators selected to participate in the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities' *5x5* "temporary public art" initiative in 2014.[50] For this project, Fung created "a temporary sculpture park" on an empty plot of land in Washington, DC.[51] His "curatorial statement" expands upon the relationship between permanence and impermanence as manifested in the project:[52]

> Monuments by definition are meant to be everlasting, but over time their meanings can change and become irrelevant. […]
>
> My goal is to produce permanent monuments by creating temporary public artworks – nonuments. Each nonument tackles timely, relevant, and emotionally engaging concerns. […] By giving form to these issues, stimulating discussion, and possibly inspiring action, these temporary monuments will leave an ongoing, living legacy beyond the lifespan of any bronze statue.[53]

As Fung notes, the immortality that monuments are intended to provide the persons and events they commemorate may in fact be far more ephemeral than either their medium or design would suggest. Fung therefore shifts the burden of lastingness from the work as static object to the work as dynamic agent; the cultural changes that these works provoke become the intangible yet permanent remains of tangible but impermanent objects.

As we have seen from this brief survey, ephemeral art has a direct relation to finitude. Through the brevity of their existence, ephemeral works call attention to temporality and endings; theirs is not a slow, hidden disappearance, but an acknowledged and anticipated one. Moreover, because a work's impermanence is regarded neither as unexpected nor concerning, there is no perceived need to enact conservation measures of the kind that are routinely applied to intentionally permanent works in an attempt to increase the longevity of their medium. Instead, artists consciously accept the temporary nature of their work and allow it to manifest impermanence unimpeded; indeed, this transience is sometimes facilitated.

As the preceding examples illustrate, there are diverse reasons for the creation of ephemeral art. Some artists choose to mirror the ephemerality of life as a response

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[50] DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, "Curators," *The 5x5 Project*, accessed May 6, 2015, http://www.the5x5project.com/curators2014/.

[51] Ibid., "Overview," *The 5x5 Project*, accessed May 4, 2015, http://www.the5x5project.com/overview/.

[52] Lance M. Fung, "Nonuments – Exhibition Description," *Fung Collaboratives*, accessed May 1, 2015, http://www.fungcollaboratives.org/projects/current/nonuments-2/description/ (page no longer available).

[53] Ibid.

to their experiences of finitude. For other artists, their aesthetic aims can only be accomplished by accepting those material and circumstantial limitations that will result in their works' impermanence. Thus, artists who choose to use perishable materials will create works that are inherently transient. Likewise, when viewer participation or particular locations are integral aesthetic components, the creation of temporary works is often the only option. In these instances, other aesthetic values supersede that of permanence.

In spite of this conscious acceptance of aesthetic finitude, the preservation of ephemeral art remains a relevant concern for many. Collectors, museums, viewers, and even some artists, seek to mitigate the loss of these works in some way. Indeed, in many cases, the public would not otherwise know of them. To this end, various strategies of alternative preservation are brought to bear upon ephemeral art's impermanence. Ephemeral works are often documented, sometimes repeated or recreated, and usually subjects of discussion long after their physical disappearance. However, remedies such as these are not without difficulties. They raise complex issues including authenticity, the relative importance of particularity, materiality, and viewer embodiment, value in relation to transience, in addition to the nature of aesthetic presence-in-absence. Finitude, its nature and our response to it, is the backdrop against which these issues arise.

To explore these issues among others, we will examine two types of ephemeral art in greater detail: intentional and intrinsic, as represented by the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and Andy Goldsworthy, respectively. After examining the nature of and reasons for their works' ephemerality, we will consider how the artists, their viewers, critics, and supporters understand and respond to the works' impermanence as manifestations of the human response to finitude, before turning to the theological implications of these in the subsequent chapter.

III. Consciously Ephemeral Art: Two Case Studies

While both Christo and Jeanne-Claude and Andy Goldsworthy have created significant works of art that are permanent, they are perhaps most well known for their ephemeral works: Christo and Jeanne-Claude for their large-scale installations in diverse settings across the globe, which temporarily occupy borrowed public or private space and are visited by thousands, and Goldsworthy for his exterior

ephemeral sculptures made from natural materials, which are known to most through the exhibition or publication of the photographs he takes of them. While these artists equally engage in the creation of ephemeral works and are recognized for such, the nature of their works' ephemerality differs in origin and purpose. Goldsworthy's natural materials (ice, leaves, grasses, rain, etcetera) dictate their own lifespan—a duration, over which Goldsworthy has only a slight degree of control. Because he works primarily outdoors, environmental factors affect the endurance of his works in broadly predictable ways: the wind blows away leaves; the sun melts ice; the tide topples a carefully balanced tower of stones.[54] Sometimes Goldsworthy circumvents these natural factors temporarily, as he did for the Glasgow exhibition, *Snowballs in Summer*: after their construction, the large snowballs were transferred from their original outdoor location to a refrigerated facility until the time of their July exhibition in the Museum of Transport.[55] Then, as anticipated, they melted and revealed their hidden inner components: sticks, pine needles, stones, and other similar items.[56] Goldsworthy's works are thus intrinsically ephemeral: the medium and its setting dictates the work's transience. In contrast, Christo and Jeanne-Claude preset the duration of their works' life spans. Unlike Goldsworthy, the nature of their materials (fabric, ropes, oil drums, or steel cables, among other similar items) does not require the works to be ephemeral, although the settings (borrowed spaces) make a temporary existence more likely. Instead, a work's short existence results from the artists' deliberate choice to limit its duration and their actions to enact this: they dismantle and remove the works after a predetermined length of time. The work's ephemerality is therefore intentional rather than intrinsic. On occasion, the duration may be affected by additional factors outside their control, which alter their plans, but these are exceptional.[57]

While many other artists similarly engage in the creation of ephemeral art, I have selected these to represent intrinsic and intentional ephemerality primarily because their works are singular in appearance: that is, once the work disappears it cannot be recovered and will not be repeated. In these instances of definitive finitude, only documentation and memory remain to counter the works' mortality; however, these may or may not be sufficient to provide them with immortality. Additionally,

[54] For one example see Andy Goldsworthy, *Stone* (London: Viking, 1994), 100-01.
[55] Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 116.
[56] Ibid., 116-119; images, 120-23.
[57] These factors are usually environmental.

this quality of aesthetic singularity provides a rich platform for continuing our broader theological discussion of the human response to finitude, especially in relation to human ephemerality.

III. a. Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Intentionally Ephemeral Art

III. a. i. Artist Profile

An artistic partnership since the 1960s, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been involved in the creation of more than twenty-five large-scale temporary projects during a span of almost fifty years, beginning with *Stacked Oil Barrels and Dockside Packages, Cologne Harbor* in 1961.[58] While Christo's career as an artist pre-dates that of Jeanne-Claude (and, with her death in 2009, post-dates it as well) it largely involved the creation of permanent works, including those known as "store fronts" and "packages".[59] These were structures whose partially covered windows concealed any interior from view and paint cans or other common objects hidden beneath wrapped fabric and rope.[60] He also painted numerous commissioned portraits under his surname, Javacheff, but does not regard these as part of his serious artistic oeuvre;[61] they were merely a way to meet basic survival needs, like rent, during the early years of his career after his defection from communist Bulgaria in 1957.[62] It was through one such portrait client—Précilda de Guillebon—that Christo met Jeanne-Claude, Mme. de Guillebon's daughter, whom he married in 1962.[63] Jeanne-Claude was not an artist when they met but became one as a result of her relationship with Christo.

Of the two, only Christo was trained as an artist so he alone produces the preparatory drawings that are integral to the process of realizing their temporary projects.[64] These drawings and other of his early works are sold to collectors in order

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[58] Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Life and Work." Although these do range in size – including wrapped statues or stacked oil barrels, which are smaller.

[59] Molly Donovan, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude in the Vogel Collection* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 16-17, 21-23.

[60] Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 50, 54. See images in Donovan, *Vogel Collection*, 55-60.

[61] Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 21, 23-24, 54, 57.

[62] Ibid., 1, 21, 54, 57.

[63] Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 60-63, 118. Fineberg, *The Gates, 16.*

[64] He was trained at the Sofia Academy of Fine Arts in Bulgaria before his defection. Finberg, *The Gates*, 13.

to self-fund these ephemeral works, which usually carry enormous price tags for completion—often millions of dollars.[65] This method of financing the substantial costs of a project is intentional.[66] It enables each work to have the freedom the artists desire for it. Because they receive no funding from sponsors, there is no one who might impose additional "conditions" or alterations to these works.[67]

While their works are short-lived, often remaining only a couple of weeks, most have required many years and even decades to achieve their realization. Legal obstacles often stand in the way of permissions to use public and private land or architectural structures (such as the Pont Neuf in Paris) as installation sites.[68] These obstacles may take many years to overcome. Consequently, the idea for a work might be conceived several decades before the work is brought into existence, as was the case with *The Gates* in New York City. First proposed in 1979, *The Gates* was only able to proceed to completion in 2005 when the city's government finally granted permission to use Central Park;[69] the proposal had been rejected by previous administrations.[70] Likewise, *The Mastaba for Abu Dhabi* and *Over the River*, two of three current projects "in progress", were ideated decades earlier: in 1977 and 1992, respectively.[71] The necessity of *completion for existence* is an important factor in considering their work. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's works are, by their own assertion, not conceptual art.[72] Thus, the idea is not the work; it requires material manifestation. The realization of the work in its physical form is, therefore, essential to the project. The addition of an intentionally ephemeral aesthetic also means that material absence is the expected outcome of each project's completion. Both these

[65] See his response to interview question "How will you finance this large-scale project?" in Christo. *Christo: The Umbrellas (Joint Project for Japan and USA)*. Photographs by Wolfgang Volz. London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1988 [n.p.].

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Fineberg, *The Gates*, 42.

[69] Ibid., 96.

[70] Ken Miller, "Q. and A. | Christo on Jeanne-Claude, the Art of the Process and Trying to Drape a River in Fabric," T (blog), *NYTimes*, April 23, 2104, accessed April 26, 2014., http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/christo-interview/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.

[71] Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Life and Work." The third is *The Floating Piers* (summer 2016). Matthias Koddenberg, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: The Mastaba: Project for Abu Dhabi UAE*, photographs by Wolfgang Volz, picture commentary by Jonathan Henery (Cologne: Taschen, 2012), 8. See "Over the River Chronology" in Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Over the River: Project for the Arkansas River, State of Colorado* (London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 2005), n.p.

[72] Jeanne-Claude, "Most Common Errors: Conceptual Artists," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed August 27, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/common-errors.

factors have implications for the role of documentation, which we will consider later in the chapter.

III. a. ii. The Manifestation of and Rationale for Intentional Ephemerality

On September 10, 1976, a twenty-four and a half mile white nylon fabric fence crisscrossed the roads and California ranch land of Sonoma and Marin counties before disappearing into the Pacific Ocean.[73] This work of art known as *Running Fence* required "forty-two months of collaborative efforts between 1973 and 1976, the ranchers' participation, eighteen public hearings, three sessions at the superior courts of California, the drafting of a 450-page Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and the temporary use of the hills, sky, and the ocean," at a cost of $3 million.[74] As planned, it remained only fourteen days, after which no physical trace of its existence was visible.[75] Such intentional ephemerality is no anomaly in the artists' oeuvre. Their work has long been characterized by an aesthetic of foreordained endings in which, after a pre-determined and relatively short period of time, a work is removed and the installation site is restored to its original state.[76] For instance, today, the paths of New York City's Central Park no longer display the 7,503 saffron fabric panels that lined them for sixteen days in 2005, as part of a work known as *The Gates*.[77] Similarly, although it took more than three decades to move from initial proposal (1961) to completion (1995), Berlin's visitors and inhabitants had only two weeks during which to see—and even touch—the *Wrapped Reichstag* while the entire building was

[73] From text based on previously published caption texts in Brian O'Doherty, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Running Fence*: Still Running." In Brian O'Doherty, et al., *Christo and Jeanne-Claude Remembering the "Running Fence"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 178.

[74] Ibid., 176; Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 268.

[75] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 178. The distribution or sale of most materials and equipment continued into October. This $3 million work of art was recycled into, among other things, covers for manure piles and curtains. Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 268.

[76] For example, The *Wall of Oil Barrels—The Iron Curtain* in Paris lasted only 8 hours; the *Wrapped Coast* in Little Bay, Australia: 10 weeks; the *Wrapped Trees* in Riehen, Switzerland: 23 days; *The Gates* in New York City: 16 days. From Christo and Jeanne-Claude's official website: "The Wall of Oil Barrels—The Iron Curtain," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed August 17, 2013, http://www .christojeanneclaude.net/projects/wall-of-oil-barrels---the-iron-curtain?view=info; "Wrapped Coast," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed August 17, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/ projects/wrapped-coast?view=info#.Ug9xSmSbiJU; "Wrapped Trees," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed August 17, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/projects/wrapped-trees?view=info#.Ug9x0 GSbiJU; "The Gates," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed August 17, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net /projects/the-gates?view=info#.Ug9yImSbiJU.

[77] Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "The Gates."

enveloped in a silvery fabric crisscrossed with blue rope.[78] Because a work's duration is pre-set, issues of long-term material degradation are not a driving concern. Having said that, sometimes conditions do unexpectedly alter the artists' original plans. *Valley Curtain*, for instance, had to be removed after only 28 hours when the enormous orange nylon panel that stretched across an expanse near Highway 325 in Rifle, Colorado was damaged by gale force winds.[79] Jan van de Marck described the *Curtain's* dramatic ending: "…A sight of overwhelming beauty was transformed in seconds into a paroxysm of ripping fabric...".[80]

Yet whether a work lasts 28 hours or 28 days, it is still notably transient; these works appear and then disappear, leaving no physical trace of their previous existence in the space they temporarily altered.[81] Indeed, they have been aptly described as "nomadic"—an term, which appropriately emphasizes their ephemeral character.[82] Fabric is one element the artists use to create this transitory relationship. As Christo explains,

> The fabric lends dynamic form to my projects, because you know very well it's not going to remain forever, and that it will be removed.
>
> [Fabric] creates temporary, and not permanent, relations between things. It is very ephemeral.[83]
>
> The fabric conveys the fragility of the work that will be gone.

Thus, the original 178 trees of Berower and Fondation Beyeler parkland in Riehen, Switzerland still exist, but their 1998 transfiguration into *Wrapped Trees* is no longer

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[78] See *The Reichstag and Urban Projects*, ed. Jacob Baal-Teshuva (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1993), 26-27; *Dem Deutschen Volke: Verhülter Reichstag, 1971-1995*, directed by Wolfram Hissen and Jörg Daniel Hissen, (1996; Univerfumfilm, 2005), DVD.

[79] Rudy Chiappini, ed., *Christo and Jeanne-Claude* (Milan: Skira, 2006), 121.

[80] As quoted in Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 220.

[81] They return the space to its original state and the materials are given away to be recycled for other uses: Jeanne-Claude, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude Hurt the Environment," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed, March 6, 2014, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/common-errors; Masahiko Yanagi, "Interview with Christo", in *The Reichstag and Urban Projects*, 27-28. While the land and buildings remain, the relationship between the impermanent and permanent elements no longer tangibly exists.

[82] Christo refers to them in this way: Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Christo*, photographs by Wolfgang Volz, eds. Simone Philippi and Charles Brace (Köln: Taschen, 1995) 86; See also video of Christo's December 6, 2010 lecture at the Architectural League, New York City: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Christo Lecturing about Over the River and The Mastaba (Part 2/2)," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed May 16, 2015, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/videos/christo-lecturing-about-over-the-river-and-the-mastaba-part-22#.VVdlj5NViko, 25:00-26:37; in interview with Masahiko Yanagi: Christo. *Christo: The Umbrellas*, [n.p.].

[83] Yard, *Christo: Oceanfront*, 27; Baal-Teshuva, *Christo*, 86.

visible; the translucent fabric that transformed what the park visitor perceived for 23 days is simply not there.[84]

While the nature of a work's construction (location and size) makes permanence inherently difficult if not impossible, the qualities of freedom, urgency, and uniqueness are, in actuality, the driving factors behind its transience.[85] Regarding a work-in-progress (*Over the River*), Christo was recently asked whether he "secretly" wished to create similar works that would be permanent.[86] He replied:

> No I would like to explain why our project is temporary is basically is additional aesthetical quality. All through the history of art, that is to works of art with stone, with steel, with bronze, with fresco, and all this art was to become permanent. But that additional quality myself Jeanne-Claude adding to the work of art is that fragility, temporariness that the work will be gone. That is something never happen again. Like our childhood, we know the childhood will be gone. That our life, that life will be gone. And all of our project is temporary project. It have this presence of missing. This is why they are unique. When the people go to see our project they are in the presence of something tomorrow will be gone forever. And this tenderness, this love we have for something that will not stay we like to embody, to give to the work of art like additional aesthetical quality. And this is why this project created that uniqueness. Uniqueness is the most important part of our projects.[87]

It is an oft-repeated explanation through which the artists emphasize the aesthetic significance of impermanence. In keeping with their nomadic nature, these works intentionally relate to their surroundings by "creating readjustment and new responses to borrowed objects and spaces";[88] this "dynamic situation", Christo insists, "cannot be kept boxed" and, therefore, necessitates the work's transience.[89] Regarding the imminent removal of *Wrapped Trees* in 1998, the artists similarly stated: "The temporary character of a work of art creates a feeling of fragility, vulnerability, and an urgency to be seen, as well as a presence of the missing, because we know it will be gone tomorrow."[90] Imminent finitude alters our perceptions, our awareness of something's importance. Dominique Laporte interprets Christo's pursuit of the

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[84] "Wrapped Trees," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*; "Life and Work," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*. Of course these are not without changes after nearly two decades—*living* trees hardly provide a "fixed canvas" for a work of art.

[85] See his response to interview question in Christo. *Christo: The Umbrellas*, [n.p.].

[86] Christo, "Why are Christo and Jeanne-Claude's Works Temporary?", accessed May 16, 2015, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude,* http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/videos/why-are-christo-and-jeanne-claudes-projects-temporary, Video, 1.22 min.

[87] From author's transcription of video: ibid.

[88] In interview with Masahiko Yanagi: Christo, *Christo: The Umbrellas,* [n.p.].

[89] Ibid.

[90] Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 350.

"'involuntary beauty of the ephemeral'" as the desire "to invest his work with the quality that produces the fleeting singularity of the instant."[91] As in the Japanese aesthetic that joins beauty with sorrow, the work's ephemerality focuses attention on the uniqueness of a limited existence and, thus, draws beauty from impermanence. Laporte explains:

> The involuntary beauty of the ephemeral refers to those incomparable moments when an object, a view, a form—in fact, anything at all—appears suddenly, alone unto itself, purged of its everydayness, strangely and eerily beautiful. Something hitherto unseen which we suddenly start to see. Something unrepeatable, something that existed one time only and, because of this uniqueness, is in itself both act and meaning. Something forever inaccessible and forever lost that evokes a feeling of the unreal.[92]

There is, indeed, a "forever lost" aspect to their work, to which Christo and Jeanne-Claude frequently allude; they draw attention to parallel instances of loss and transience in human experience, such as the passing of childhood or the brief appearance of a rainbow. As they note, people usually respond with "love and tenderness" towards "what does not last" and it is this "aesthetic quality" they hope to attach to these "once in a lifetime" occurrences.[93] The sense of "urgency" that such finitude engenders is a familiar response. Jeanne-Claude recognized this and, thus, often said: "For instance, if someone were to tell you, 'Oh, look on the right, there is a rainbow.' You will never answer, 'I will look at it tomorrow.'"[94]

Not only does a work's ephemerality create a sense of urgency for the viewer, it also allows the work to retain its independence. By disallowing the possibility of

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[91] Both Laporte and Christo in Dominique G. Laporte, *Christo*, trans. Abby Pollak (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 69. Emphasis Laporte's.

[92] Ibid., 28.

[93] Jeanne-Claude, "General Information," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed, March 6, 2014, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/common-errors. See December 2003 "Interview": *Umbrellas,* directed by Albert Maysles, Henry Corra, and Grahame Weinbren, 1994 (New York: Plexifilm, 2004.), DVD. See also video of Christo's December 6, 2010 lecture at the Architectural League, New York City: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Christo Lecturing about Over the River and The Mastaba (Part 2/2)," 25:00-26:37. The artists do not recreate any of their previously realized projects. Donovan, *Vogel Collection*; Würth Museum*, Christo and Jeanne-Claude: The Würth Museum Collection* (London: Philip Wilson, 2004), 51.

[94] From a 2002 interview with James Pagliasotti as included on Christo and Jeanne-Clude's official website: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "An Interview with Christo and Jeanne-Claude." *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed March 15, 2011, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/eyeLevel.shtml (page no longer available). See also: Jeanne-Claude, "General Information," *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, accessed, March 6, 2014, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/common-errors.

ownership—a requirement of both sponsorship and permanence—Christo and Jeanne-Claude ensure that a work remains free from outside control.[95] Christo asserts:

> Nobody can buy those works, nobody can own them, nobody can commercialize them, nobody can charge tickets for them. Even ourselves, we do not own these works. The work is about freedom, and freedom is the enemy of possession, and possession is the equal of permanence. This is why the work cannot stay.[96]

There is a paradox here. Christo and Jeanne-Claude do not own the work yet they determine the duration of its life span and dictate the details of its creation. At the same time, when the work disappears they no longer retain any hold over it; it has slipped beyond their (and anyone else's) reach. We might say, therefore, that the work both embodies and possesses freedom; it is an aesthetic object on the one hand, and a "living" subject on the other.

As we have already seen, the artists' explication of their ephemeral aesthetic is punctuated by references to parallels in human experience: those things that are valued but inherently transient, like one's childhood or life, more generally. It mirrors the experience in kind. Thus, aesthetic finitude, in this instance, speaks to both artistic as well as human concerns. At the same time, humanity's (and the artist's) perdurance and aesthetic permanence are often linked through the latter's apparent provision of surrogate immortality. About this in relation to their works, Christo states:

> the temporary character of the project is also an esthetic decision to challenge the immortality of art: if art is immortal, if buildings in gold, steel and stone is really immortal and will make us live for ever, probably it is more courageous to go away than to stay.[97]

What, then, should be said about the value of works that do not persist? Wherein lies the lastingness, if any, of ephemeral art?

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[95] Christo reiterates this point in: Masahiko Yanagi, "Interview with Christo", in *The Reichstag and Urban Projects*, 28.

[96] In Baal-Teshuva, *Christo*, 86.

[97] Ibid.

III. a. iii. The Response to Intentional Aesthetic Finitude

III. a. iii. 1. The Value of Transience

Since our response to something's finitude reflects what we value, it should not be surprising that the artists' decision to create temporary artworks has been both lauded and criticized. Supporters champion the benefits of aesthetic transience: O'Doherty describes "impermanence" as "a kind of grace" "in a world cluttered with things".[98] Others, in contrast, call its virtues into question, especially in light of the artworks' substantial price tags—often, millions of dollars. One critic objected to *The Gates*: "it appears to be somewhat frivolous to spend all that money for kind of a terrific hype for two weeks when a lot of people are hungry."[99] The subtext, of course, implies that art—especially temporary art—has little or no value for meeting humanity's *real* needs.[100] In his discussion of "'land art'", Malpas notes the wake of objections that typically follow any such costly "transformations of the ordinary";[101] "Perhaps", he queries, "if Christo spent 26 million dollars on providing food for the needy instead of wrapping a building in Berlin in a bit of plastic, people would not be so angry?"[102] Similar reactions suggest an underlying assumption that greater effort and expense should only be followed by something equally enduring. For instance, when *Running Fence* was proposed, "art critic Allan Temko" was openly critical: "'If you want to see something big and great, just go out and look at the Golden Gate Bridge, in which things are done permanently, for the greater enrichment of the community, not for temporary rip-off.'"[103] Yet not everyone agreed with him. During one of the project's public hearings, a landowner (through whose property the fence would run) offered her own positive assessment of the value of ephemeral art: "'There was one thing said about art being temporal. Some of the meals I prepare aren't much […]. But

[98] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 53.

[99] As quoted in Jonathan Fineberg, *On the Way to The Gates: Central Park, New York City,* with photographs by Wolfgang Volz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 153.

[100] It is perhaps an unfair criticism considering the number of people the artists gave employment to—and, thus, paid—in both manufacturing the parts and installing the project. All monies are used for realizing the project; the artists are not trying to make a profit. Moreover, while there is certainly no doubt that ensuring all have enough to eat is a worthwhile goal, the irony is that hunger is an ever-recurring problem—one's stomach is never *permanently* filled, but only temporarily.

[101] William Malpas, *Andy Goldsworthy: Touching Nature*, 2nd ed. (Kidderminster, UK: Crescent Moon, 1999), 48.

[102] Ibid.

[103] As quoted in Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 246.

sometimes I go through a lot of work to prepare something that I think is art. It's a masterpiece. And what happens…it gets eaten up.'"[104] At a post-*Fence* celebration, attorney Edwin C. Anderson Jr. responded similarly to the controversy the work had created:[105] "'There are those who argue that the *Running Fence* was temporary and therefore a waste. But life is a fleeting moment between two eternities, and for us the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude have made our moment brighter.'"[106]

Early in Christo's career, art critic and curator Lawrence Alloway commented on his works' finitude, suggesting that ephemeral art was no less aesthetically satisfying than art that was supposedly unchanging and permanent. He argued, therefore, that ephemeral art offered the opportunity to reassess a previously limited locus of value:

> Christo's category of Temporary Monuments is important, an acknowledgement, among others in the post-war period, that the value of art is not exclusively bound to ideas of fixity or permanence. He has accepted a temporary status for his art when he has packaged whole trees […], which will die and shrink, or girls […], whose tolerances of their mantles is limited. Other temporary situations were Christo's arrangements of oil drums, on the docks in Cologne […] and in the street […]. The aesthetic of an expendable art is no less serious, no less rigorous, than that attached by idealist art criticism to supposedly immutable works. The huge scale at which Christo is now able to work presumes impermanence. The art is occasional, but our involvement with an occasion can be as satisfactory, as absorbing, as with art of an hypothetical permanence.[107]

Pointing to similar ventures within the history of art, Arnold Herstand drew parallels between Christo and Jeanne-Claude's projects, such as the *42,390 Cubicfeet Package*, and the common Renaissance practice of artists creating temporary but "extravagant festivals" or "ephemeral pageants".[108] While O'Doherty agrees with Alloway's proposal that equal aesthetic satisfaction is possible, he argues, in addition, that a work's transience *increases* its value in an age of excessive "clutter[…]";[109] thus, the experience of "something wonderful that lasts a brief moment" can even be "more valuable than the drone of permanent objects conveying themselves into the

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[104] As quoted in accompanying booklet to Albert and David Maysles, dir., *Five Films about Christo and Jeanne-Claude* (New York: Plexifilm, 2004), 3.

[105] Anderson represented the artists in their quest for Sonoma County planning commission and board approvals. Edwin C. Anderson Jr., "Between Two Eternities," in O'Doherty et al., *Remembering the "Running Fence,"* 105.

[106] Ibid., 105.

[107] Lawrence Alloway, *Christo* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), IX.

[108] In Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 171-72.

[109] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 53.

future".[110] Moreover, as he astutely observes, knowing that the work is temporary, even alters the aesthetic experience: it focuses "[a]ttention"; "senses are on full alert, remembering even as you perceive."[111] This, of course, is the response that the art's ephemeral aesthetic is intended to provoke: an increased awareness of the work's value promoted by a sense of urgency. Nonetheless, some still find the work's intentional impermanence disconcerting or, viewed more positively, disappointing. A German factory worker employed in the construction of materials for the *Wrapped Reichstag* couldn't see the point of creating something temporary: in his view, art—because it's art—should be permanent.[112] In another instance, a viewer, obviously enjoying his experience of *The Gates*, expressed a desire for the work to remain longer in Central Park and regretted that it would not.[113]

A person's initial response to intentional aesthetic finitude, therefore, appears to depend upon her presuppositions about value and permanence (in general) as well as the purpose and value of art. Many who share the New York viewer's disappointment that his enjoyment of the work in person would come to an end, look instead to documentation to extend their experience.

III. a. iii. 2. The Role of Documentation

When artist Judy Chicago questioned Christo's purported rejection of aesthetic immortality, she objected: "But despite its transitory nature, Christo's work does not seem in any danger of 'going away.'"[114] Indeed, in spite of the works' disappearance, knowledge of them has endured. Read within the context of her desire to secure artistic immortality for *all* artists through the comprehensive preservation of contemporary art rather than only those artists and works that the majority consider valuable, her observation accurately reflects the substantial effort that has been expended to extensively document and, thus, seemingly extend the life of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's ephemeral works. Even the artists' immortality in the annals of art

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[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid.

[112] *Dem Deutschen Volke: Verhülter Reichstag, 1971-1995*, DVD.

[113] *The Gates*, directed by Antonio Ferrera, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Matthew Prinzing (New York: Lorber HT Digital, 2008), DVD. Charles Taylor notes a similar response to the Paris *Pont Neuf* installation: Charles Taylor, "Poetic Gestures," in accompanying booklet for *Five Films about Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, directed by Albert and David Maysles (New York: Plexifilm, 2004) 27-28.

[114] Chicago, "Hope Springs Eternal," 147.

history seems assured. The brief lives of these ephemeral works, thus, appear to possess enduring afterlives through documentation. Films, photographs, and books about the projects, which the artists oversee and often fund, are made in collaboration with documentary filmmakers and photographers with whom they have longstanding relationships, such as Albert and David Maysles, and Wolfgang Volz, among others.[115] An official website is maintained, which chronicles both past and ongoing projects.[116] Moreover, every project is preceded by numerous preparatory drawings, collages, and models, which bear witness to Christo's uncanny ability to envision the finished work. These preparatory works, which are both necessary to the artists' process and "works of art in their own right", are sold to fund each new project and become part of permanent art collections around the world.[117] Published books are filled with carefully chosen items associated with the project, such as artist statements, interviews, excerpts of official documents related to gaining permission to use a site, reproductions of preliminary sketches, photographs of the finished work or elements relating to the process—depending on whether the book precedes or postdates the project's completion.[118] Sometimes, eyewitness accounts or critical essays accompany this visually rich collection.[119] It is not surprising, therefore, that some would suggest, as Chicago did, that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's works possess afterlives that belie their ephemeral nature. Indeed, extensive records such as these would seem to ensure that they possess an enduring aesthetic presence. As is also true for ephemeral art more generally, these documentary records are the only means by which many will know these works after they have been dismantled. Thus, during conversations with community officials and other "gatekeepers", the artists use records of past projects to give context to future proposals.[120] Of course the operative

[115] David Bourdon, *Christo*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, [n.d.]), 153, 55. Koddenberg, *The Mastaba*, 165.

[116] See *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/.

[117] Marina Vaizey, *Christo* (London: Academy Editions, 1991) 9. See Donovan, *Vogel Collection*.

[118] Bourdon, *Christo*, 153, 55.

[119] For example: G. Wayne Clough, "Remembrance from an Observer," in O'Doherty et al., *Remembering the "Running Fence,"* 23-25.

[120] For instance, in a photograph of a meeting with governor Fujio Takeuchi, Christo and Jeanne-Claude are shown using both preparatory sketches of *The Umbrellas* and a book opened to an image of a previously realized project (*Surrounded Islands*) to explain the project proposal. Christo, *Christo: The Umbrellas,* [n.p.]. Similarly, Anderson notes that when talking to ranchers to gain permission to use their land the artists showed the film "*Valley Curtain,* which not only made this new project easier to envision, but also showed how deeply moving and satisfying the process was for everybody involved." Anderson Jr., "Between Two Eternities," 104. Usage of documentation of previous works is also seen in their documentary films.

question in considering documentation's capacity is "what does such documentation preserve?" Does it enable a fresh encounter with the work—to know the work as one knows a person—or does it only provide knowledge *about* the work, in the way that a biography would? How one answers these questions reflects upon one's understanding of finitude.

As we saw in chapter two, the prevailing desire to counter aesthetic finitude and ensure that works are not irrevocably lost to future viewers extends also to those works that are unavoidably ephemeral. Thus, when Fung published *The Snow Show* exhibition catalogue, his aim was to provide the readers with a measure of the aesthetic experience that the original viewers had enjoyed.[121] Whether an approximately 7½ x 8 inch book can provide something even remotely commensurate to the experience of walking amongst snow and ice sculptures, many of which exceed human height, is certainly debatable. Certainly, one might try to imagine the experience. It could also be argued that other intangible or conceptual aspects of the work—that is, the idea behind the work—are successfully communicated. Although of a different kind, there can be aesthetic appreciation of and engagement with both. Nevertheless, regardless of documentation's success or failure, it is the "crisis" of the ephemeral work's absence that gives rise both to the hope and the assertion that it, along with memory, can ameliorate, and in some cases negate, the negative consequences of transience.

Indeed, there are those who seem to desire or expect similar provision in regard to the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude. For instance, art historian Werner Spies describes documentation as the means by which their works "live on";[122] he interprets Christo and Jeanne-Claude's use of "[p]hotography, film, statistics, and reports […] to record the work" as a means by which to "guarantee its survival."[123] While the basic recording function of documentation is perhaps unarguable, Spies glosses the practice with terminology usually associated with life, which seems to imply that documentation accomplishes something more substantial than providing access to information about the work. In a similar way, Albert Maysles speaks of his

[121] See Fung, *The Snow Show*, 11, 206; Jacobs, introduction to ibid., 4.

[122] Werner Spies, "The Fascination of Ephemeral Projects," in *Christo and Jeanne*-Claude, ed. Rudy Chiappini (Milan: Skira, 2006) 92.

[123] Werner Spies, introduction to *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Prints and Objects 1963-95: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2nd ed., trans. John Gabriel, eds. Jörg Schellman and Joséphine Benecke, (München: Schulmann, 1995) 4-5.

documentary films as enabling the works to continue.[124] Art historian Albert Elsen emphasized place association as the permanent souvenir of the work and, thus, an enduring counter to its absence:

> [Christo and Jeanne-Claude] momentarily intervene, creating as they put it, "gentle disturbances" between earth and sky in order to refocus our impressions […]. Christo and Jeanne-Claude believe the temporary nature of their projects gives them more energy and intensifies our response. But once they have wrapped a structure or intervened in a place, they are forever associated with that site.[125]

Such superlative language ("forever") evokes aesthetic immortality and suggests that memory offers the work an efficacious means of perdurance. For the eyewitnesses, the place or building functions like Proust's "madeleine": it calls the absent work to remembrance. Indeed, the artists themselves seem to acknowledge this potential: "Maybe it's a bit corny, but we love to hold hands and look at, in our mind's eye, our work that is no longer there but the site is there."[126] For two persons so intimately connected with the tiniest details of their projects' construction, one does not find it hard to imagine their ability to do so effectively.

However, memory is not without limitations. Elsen's poetic projection into the future assumes permanent associations that we must acknowledge do not even exist for many sites of historic significance; in spite of built monuments, the events and people they memorialize are forgotten or insufficiently remembered with the passing of time and their eyewitnesses. (As noted earlier in this chapter, it was Fung's recognition of this tendency that promoted his creation of temporary *Nonuments*.) In the case of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, the artists return each site to its original pre-project state; thus, there are no artificial markers left to serve as visual prompts or reminders.[127] This means that a site's associative power lies in the individuated knowledge of the eyewitnesses, who themselves possess a limited lifespan. The work, therefore, resides precariously in human memory and, consequently, has no guaranteed immortality. As Jacob Baal-Teshuva underscores, memory by itself can only be a temporary lodging:

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[124] In the commentary to *Running Fence* (1977), directed by Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin (Plexifilm, 2004), DVD.

[125] Albert Elsen, "The Freedom to Be Christo and Jeanne-Claude," in *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, ed. Rudy Chiappini (Milan: Skira, 2006) 19.

[126] Jeanne-Claude as quoted in Elizabeth Broun, "Creating Joy and Beauty," in O'Doherty et al., *Remembering the "Running Fence,"* 122.

[127] One exception: a *Running Fence* pole was turned into a flagpole by the local post office.

> Again and again, temporariness becomes the issue — and arguably a more pertinent issue than the somewhat airy "forever" invoked by Elsen, which would be a "forever" wholly bounded by human lifespans if there were no other witness to the Christos' projects than the memories of those who were there.[128]

Hence, Baal-Teshuva and others, rest their hopes on the plethora of "other witnesses" that still exist.[129] These also include those pieces of documentation through which others have "seen the work": the latter a claim by Marina Vaizey, whom he references.[130] Vaizey extends remembrance of the work beyond that of the eyewitnesses who saw the physical work, to those who saw it "on film, on television, in the newspapers", insisting that it is also in these memories that "it [the work] remains."[131] However, Baal-Teschuva's moderated faith in memory's efficacy for the work's long-term survival means that he looks to pre-project and post-project documentation as the primary mechanism to accomplish this:

> Memory is limited in time, but the accompanying and preparatory works Christo makes in the course of the projects palpably have the age-old function of defying time and insisting that they (and thus the artwork as a whole) will endure. The argument involving the memories of those who see their artworks, so often put forward, has precarious implications, since it can lead us to conclude that art need exist only in the mind — a fallacy, surely. But Christo's ancillary works do indeed have the function of declaring that his creations remain.[132]

But *what* remains? Baal-Teshuva rightly cautions against resorting to conceptualism, which negates the material. Moreover, the artists have always insisted that the work's material manifestation is essential to the work's completion;[133] the work is, thus, more than the idea. Yet to equate permanent "ancillary works" with the ephemeral work is also problematic, and raises additional questions about the ontology of the artwork and its potential for perdurance. How should we regard the relation between the ephemeral work's material manifestation and "the work"? Are they contingent and cotemporaneous or independent? One's response to the former's finitude is derived from one's understanding of that relationship.

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[128] Baal-Teshuva, *Christo*, 47-48.
[129] Ibid., 47.
[130] As quoted in ibid.
[131] As quoted in ibid.
[132] Ibid., 47-48. Vaizey also includes such accompanying works as part of what remains. She says: "And an integral part is Christo's own portable art, the magnificent sketches, drawings, collages and prints that are both his drawings and works of art in their own right." In ibid., 47.
[133] Jeanne-Claude, "Most Common Errors: Conceptual Artists,"

Both Vaizey and Baal-Teshuva suggest that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's "ancillary works"—the preparatory drawings, scale models, and other forms of documentation—serve as an antidote to the work's disappearance.[134] Yet while they are certainly, as Vaizey describes them, "works of art in their own right", they also alter or lack, to varying degrees, innate qualities of the materially manifested work, including the scale of the work as experienced in situ.[135] Moreover, preparatory sketches equally exist for projects that were never or not yet realized—that is, brought into material existence. Some projects for which preliminary sketches and collages exist have either been abandoned or are still in the queue awaiting completion.[136] In such cases, preparatory works attest to the *absence* of a creation, one that was or is hoped for, but has not yet (or never will) come into existence.

In many instances, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been explicit about the kind of aesthetic encounter that the works are intended to provide the viewer. As is true for most installation art, it involves an embodied sensory experience. In the absence of the work, the various forms of documentation must rely on the viewer's imagination to provide something similar. Film provides auditory as well as visual clues, while static images provide only the latter. However, some forms of documentation also enable visual perspectives (such as aerial views) that the artists never intended to be part of the viewer's direct encounter with the work.[137] In 1998 Jeanne-Claude explained some of their aesthetic aims in detail:

> None of [our] work is designed for the birds, all have a scale to be enjoyed by human beings who are on the ground.[138]

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[134] See ibid., 47-48.

[135] In ibid., 47.

[136] On their official website the artists post selected preparatory works made for both unrealized projects and projects in progress which are similar to those made for completed projects: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Artworks: Projects Not Realized," accessed August 31, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/projects-not-realized. One can view scale models, collages, and drawings from 1964-68 for the proposed but unrealized project *Wrapped Buildings, New York City*. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Wrapped Buildings, New York City," accessed August 31, 2103, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/projects/wrapped-buildings-new-york-city#.UiIUQmSbiJU. Their official website for "Over the River" (a work in progress) also contains the familiar preparatory drawings and collages. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Over the River: Project for the Arkansas River, State of Colorado: In Progress, " accessed August 31, 2013. http://www.overtheriverinfo.com/.

[137] In fact, the photograph or film often provides an aerial perspective that goes beyond the work's design boundaries. Such was the case in the documentary film *Running Fence*; this lends support to the suggestion that these ancillary or documentary works are interpretive works of art in their own right, and thus different from the work itself. *Running Fence* (1977), directed by Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin (Plexifilm, 2004), DVD.

[138] Jeanne-Claude, "Most Common Errors: See the Work Best By Flying," accessed August 27, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/common-errors.

> [We] have designed *The Umbrellas* to be seen by driving, walking – and going UNDER the umbrellas – resting on the sitting platform/base cover designed for this.
> *Wrapped Coast*, *Valley Curtain*, *Running Fence*, *Wrapped Walk Ways*, *The Pont Neuf Wrapped* – […] those works were designed to be experienced form [sic] the ground NOT by flying. The *Surrounded Islands* were designed to be seen from the buildings, all around the bay, from the bridges and causeways, from the roads, by boat and also from the air – […]
>
> *The Umbrellas* were NOT designed to be seen from the air – the projects can not [sic] be fully enjoyed from the air. Hundreds of umbrellas were place along the roads, very accessible, on public property for the public to freely touch, enjoy and photograph.[139]

In these descriptions, there is a recurring emphasis on human interaction with the works. Likewise, the importance of embodiment becomes clear when David Bourdon describes the full sensory experience that greeted visitors who came to view *Wrapped Coast* in 1969:

> The wrapped coast appeared deceptively soft and elastic, but the billowing swags and folds of plastic fabric concealed jagged rocks and gaping holes. Visitors, seldom certain where they were walking, had to tread cautiously in order to avoid impaling themselves on sharp stones and spiky scrub, or plunging into dangerously deep crevices. The physical ordeal was complicated by the blinding reflectiveness of the plastic, which was smooth underfoot, and especially treacherous near the surf's edge, where it was often wet and slippery. Still, it was possible to imagine that you might slide down the draped cliffs without fatal injury. And despite the hazards, many adventurous spectators fully enjoyed the combined sensations of sight, smell, and touch that were offered in such abundance.[140]

These are aspects of a work that documentation of any kind is hard pressed to duplicate. For instance, the photograph's visual primacy is unable to reveal where sight has been deceived, although Bourdon's commentary does provide a corrective. Nevertheless, the strong desire for a work to remain accessible to future viewers is one not easily abandoned; moreover, some consider documentation more than adequate for the task.

In an aesthetically insightful and detailed essay, Brian O'Doherty writes about the *Running Fence*, but not as an eyewitness: "I never saw the *Fence*. My experience

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[139] "Most Common Errors: About the Umbrellas, Japan-USA, 1984-91," in ibid. See also Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 279: "Christo told the *Kansas City Times*, "We hope when the leaves are falling over the *Wrapped Walk Ways* it will be very beautiful. . . . This is our aim, to make people aware they're putting their feet on something different."

[140] Bourdon, *Christo*, 46-47.

of it has been entirely mediated."[141] His knowledge of the work is entirely a product of secondary sources: films, photographs, and first-hand accounts. As O'Doherty considers the potential for post-event experience he asks "whether those who were not present at an event can subsequently be convinced, by various media representations, that they were."[142] Analyzing his own documentary encounters, he concludes that "the artists' preservation strategies have been more than successful" in enabling him to feel, with confidence, that he had been there and experienced the work in its fullness.[143] Thus, in O'Doherty's assessment, documentation successfully recreates the *Fence* and gives him eyewitness memories of an encounter he did not actually have; in this sense, it functions like a virtual time machine. Yet one might also argue that without the means to compare these two "experiences" of witness, O'Doherty has no way of knowing whether his conclusions are sound. While he initially raises the issue of documentation's missing sensory elements and acknowledges their importance, in the end, he dismisses them as helpful but non-essential:

> Anything that preserves the clinical tang of direct experience is to be cherished. Because the missing factor in these media reconstructions is one's own body, its proprioceptive urgencies, its exposure to wind and weather, now replaced by the sedentary viewer looking at a book or screen.[144]

The surrogacy function of documentation has been noted by Hedstrom and Perricci who suggest it enables "increase[d] access to representations of art and […] 'time-shifting' in viewing and consumption."[145] This practice, however, is not limited to works of intentional transience. Indeed, documentation is often employed as a means by which even permanent works may be indirectly encountered, overcoming those limitations that would otherwise hinder access. Of course it is also routinely used for works of intrinsic transience, such as Hill's and Goldsworthy's, through the medium of photography or film. Thus, documentation serves a pragmatic role in the attempt to circumvent aesthetic finitude. While many, including O'Doherty, appear to embrace Christo and Jeanne-Claude's decision to create works that are ephemeral, it is also clear that they desire to preserve that experience and expect that it is possible to do so. Yet we are left to wonder how much, if any, of O'Doherty's positive assessment of documentation's capability is influenced by his discomfort with the

[141] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 64.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid, 63.
[145] Hedstrom and Perricci, "It's Only Temporary," 32.

possibility of the work's irrevocable finitude and a resulting desire to overcome it. How, then, do Christo and Jeanne-Claude regard the role of documentation? As authors of the works' impermanence how do they treat their disappearance? What is their response to a work's aesthetic finitude, or transience and permanence, more generally?

Perhaps most telling in this regard are Christo's responses to specific questions about the function and capacity of documentation.[146] In a 1977 interview with the artist, Jonathan Fineberg pursued a line of inquiry that considered whether documentation enabled a work to remain.[147] Christo responded: "About the afterlife of the piece: everything is 'reference,' it is 'about' the project. There can be no substitute for the project itself."[148] He further clarified the limits of documentation, suggesting that it had the ability to describe, depict, or interpret the work but not to duplicate the experience of the original:

> The photographs show their own relation to the project. […] You cannot have a perfect idea of the project through photographs because they are an interpretation of the real life work. […] That documentation show is really like a Xerox copy of the project. We try to give some idea watching the film, looking at the photographs, touching the fabric, and seeing materials. It cannot be the project, but some decent reference. This is how I see this material, it is like a library, for reference material.[149]

These views correspond to the artist's understanding of an artwork's or artist's "prime time"—a term he uses to indicate the period of a work's creation, which is a particular, irrecoverable moment in history concomitant with the life of the artist:

> I think art exists only in the prime time of the artist. […] Imagine that *Valley Curtain* still existed, and I went there—it would look terrible. It would be badly deteriorated physically, and in a similar way deteriorated by the societal relation. It would create a misunderstanding. Because the work existed only a short time, it exists now only as a reference.[150]

> Before *Running Fence* there was no *Running Fence*; when there was a *Running Fence*, I think that was the "prime time." It was when I wanted to do it, when the ranchers were willing to let me do it, when conflicts were created. But there is no way to repeat that, there is no way to restore that.[151]

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[146] Although Christo has been the most often interviewed of the two and many of the statements that exist record his responses, the artists share the same views.

[147] Fineberg, *The Gates*, 138.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid.,139.

[150] Christo in Yard, *Christo: Oceanfront*, 27-28.

[151] In Fineberg, *The Gates*, 150.

Rather than propose timeless aesthetic immortality for these works, Christo roots their aesthetic meaning and communicative capacity in temporality and historical-relational context; not only are the works subject to material degradation but to socio-aesthetic degeneration as well. This emphasis explains, in part, why the artists never duplicate any previously made works; it also provides the logical underpinning for the artists' decisions to make each work temporary. Christo equally applies this broad-sweeping concept of work's "prime time" to works of permanent art by other artists.[152] Therefore, he argues that, even now, a fresco by "Leonardo [da Vinci]" is best known and interpreted through his contemporaries.[153] Underscoring the centrality of these ideas to the artist's work, friend and official biographer, Burt Chernow, described Christo as

> consistently maintain[ing] that there is a mortality to all art. […] He would insist that art communicated best in its own time, that a piece removed from its time and place, hermetically sealed within a museum's confines, speaks with an altered, muffled voice, if at all. Christo insisted that the "prime time of the art" mattered most. In the years ahead, his major works were to live and die in prime time. If his projects, fleeting grand gestures, were to address posterity, they would have to do so as memory and myth. Books, photographs, films, drawings, and eye-witness accounts would only hint at the breadth of his unrepeatable fantasies; preliminary studies and reproductions offered only glimpses of how his provocative, short-lived extravaganzas reveal the ceaseless transformations, beauty, and fragility of life.[154]

The artists' ephemeral aesthetic, therefore, calls attention to the passage of time, loss, and absence; in spite of its apparent promise of eternal fixity, even the works' documentation cannot avoid doing this. For instance, 1974 photographs of *The Wall – Wrapped Roman Wall* invariably show the period's distinctive fashion and design styles, since they also depict the pedestrians and automobiles, which traveled the "Via Veneto, one of the busiest avenues in Rome" along which the wall ran, during the period of the installation's exhibition.[155] There are similar witnesses to temporality and transience in the Smithsonian American Art Museum's 2010 exhibition (*Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Remembering the "Running Fence, Sonoma*

[152] Fineberg, *The Gates*, 149-50; Yard, *Christo: Oceanfront*, 28.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 85.
[155] See photographs by Harry Skunk and project info text. "The Wall – Wrapped Roman Wall," accessed March 4, 2016, http://christojeanneclaude.net/projects/the-wall---wrapped-roman-wall#.Vz74pZMrKt8. Photographs that contain fewer historical particularities achieve a greater sense of timelessness, much in the same way as Monet's Rouen Cathedral paintings do. For most of the artists' works, however, this is a visual impossibility.

and Marin Counties, California, 1972-1976", A Documentation Exhibition) in which viewers were presented with "an archive of more than 350 individual items, including fifty original preparatory works […], a sixty-eight-foot long scale model, more than 240 documentary photographs […]," and some original *Fence* materials.[156] Yet, while it is certainly an impressive array of documentation, it remains an exhibition of *everything but the work itself*. Indeed, it is because of the work's absence that the physical ephemera—the preparatory sketches, fabric and pole samples, and scale model, which are all necessary components for the realization of the work—gain new importance.[157] Even the language of the exhibition title ("remembering") acknowledges the work's temporal boundaries, which place it squarely in the past. Although the exhibition seeks to bring the past into the present, and transform absence into presence, there are persistent reminders of the irretrievable passing of both time and the work. For instance, in the exhibition's commissioned documentary film, *The "Running Fence" Revisited*, viewers hear original participants' recollections of the work or remembrances once removed, as grown children speak on their deceased parents' behalf.[158] This detail—the need for proxy speakers—and the contrast between the visibly aged faces of those interviewed for the 2010 documentary and their 1976 appearance in the first film (by Albert and David Maysles), provide stark reminders of time's passage.[159] Moreover, when all five of the Maysles brothers' early documentaries were re-released on DVD in 2004, they included a more recently recorded commentary by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, in which the tenor of their words carried the implicit assumption that the work was a part of the past: something that could be remembered, but no longer directly experienced, in the

[156] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," [flyleaf].

[157] In fact, these preparatory works are sold to finance the projects. Jeanne-Claude, "Most Common Errors: General Information," accessed August 27, 2013, http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/common-errors. The importance and value of these works to collectors is due in part to the fact that the final ephemeral work cannot itself be possessed.

[158] For example, Joe, who would have been a teenager at the time of the *Running Fence*, speaks on behalf of his father, rancher Edward Pozzi. *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: The "Running Fence" Revisited*, directed by Wolfram Hissen. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Art Museum, 2010), DVD.

[159] The artwork was realized in 1976 and thus much of the footage is from the period between 1972 and 1976; however, the film was released in 1978. Compare *Running Fence*, dir. by Maysles, Maysles and Zwerin, DVD, and *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*: *The "Running Fence" Revisited,"* dir. by Hissen, DVD. In the latter, two significantly contrasting photographs of rancher Joe Lepori show this passage of time. In addition, the film begins by showing the landscape, as it is now, barren of any markers of the Fence's existence; Hissen then seeks to "populate" that landscape with the memories of those involved with the original work and images from 1976.

present.[160]Perceived in light of these characteristics, the exhibition perhaps has more in common with a memorial event than anything else; accordingly, this only further emphasizes the work's pre-existing mortality.

As we have already noted, the artists' understanding of a work's mortality or impermanence is not reserved only for those works that are obviously and intentionally ephemeral. Nevertheless, it is *The Mastaba of Abu Dhabi*, a work currently being developed for the United Arab Emirates, which draws queries regarding their apparent departure from an ephemeral aesthetic practice, since it will be the first of their joint projects to be installed and *not* removed.[161] When completed, *The Mastaba*, a flat-topped tomb structure with sloping sides, will be a brightly colored mosaic of 410,000 empty oil barrels.[162] Given the strong connection the artists have drawn between a work's impermanence and its freedom, the creation of a large-scale work which is expected to last thousands of years and possibly involve some degree of sponsorship seems a curious anomaly in their long-standing ephemeral oeuvre.[163] It may be that, pragmatically, the project cannot be realized in any other way; indeed, there is some early precedent for this approach in their work.[164] However, Christo has never been opposed to making permanent works, although he modifies the meaning of permanence by relating it to the general transience of all things. When asked during a 2014 interview whether *The Mastaba*'s permanence "represent[ed] a change of philosophy" Christo responded:

> No, nothing in the process is different. I do a lot of work that's permanent. The drawings, the sculptures, they're permanent. If "The Mastaba" is realized, it will be the biggest art structure in the world — bigger than the Pyramid of Cheops. And really, nothing is forever.[165]

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[160] In the artists conversation with Albert Maysles they recall ("I remember") past projects, which Jeanne-Claude describes as "once upon a time" experiences. See December 2003 "Interview": *Umbrellas,* directed by Albert Maysles, Henry Corra, and Grahame Weinbren, 1994 (New York: Plexifilm, 2004.), DVD. The companion exhibition book, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Remembering the "Running Fence,"* traces the outline of the absent work through its photographs and sketches, while essays from witnesses and non-witnesses provide the textual evidence for its individual and cultural impact. As observer G. Wayne Clough attests: "Being there in person to see the *Running Fence* proved to be one of my strongest encounters with art." Clough, "Remembrance from an Observer," 25.

[161] Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 291; Koddenberg, *The Mastaba*, 8.

[162] Ibid.

[163] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 126: (4000-6000 years); Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 291: (5000-6000 years).

[164] There was an early attempt to create a similar sculpture in Houston, Texas under the sponsorship of an oil company but it was rejected. Schellman and Benecke, *Prints and Objects*, 114.

[165] In Ken Miller, "Q. and A. | Christo."

There is an apparent fluidity and complexity to the artists' understanding of permanence and impermanence. In 1974 Jeanne-Claude suggested that their works, and the altered relationships they create, would not last "forever […] even with more permanent building materials."[166] Christo reinforces this idea: "Permanence being so indefinite, I am not concerned with it […]. But the works are neither necessarily permanent nor impermanent. It's not a very permanent world anyway."[167] In another, somewhat cryptic, comment, Christo explains that aesthetic "immortality is in the mind" rather than in the "veneration" of the permanent object.[168] For Christo, the "mind of humanity" is the only thing that "never disappears";[169] it is "the only eternal thing" (at least for the duration of humanity's existence), whereas everything else is changing and transient or, as he describes it, "frame of reference".[170]

Certainly Christo and Jeanne-Claude's apparent lack of concern for the material persistence of a work is readily observable. As O'Doherty astutely observes, a work's "short life is strictly enforced" and its physical removal "suffered without apparent regret."[171] *Valley Curtain* provides an apt example of this. It took two years and two attempts to successfully realize *Valley Curtain*;[172] yet, in spite of its premature demise a day after it was finished, there was never any attempt to recreate the work to allow it to complete the full duration of its intended existence.[173] Similarly, when a work's pristine appearance has been unexpectedly compromised, they have hastened the date of the work's removal. For instance, Chernow notes that when the expanse of white polypropylene floating on the water of the Newport, RI bay as part of *Ocean Front* became "tarnished with seaweed and debris", Christo insisted: "'Remove it immediately.'"[174]

While the artists seem to assert without qualm that these works are irrevocably temporary (or, in the words of Christo, "gone forever") their concerted efforts to retain intimate details of each work give the appearance of being directed, in contrast,

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[166] Yard, *Christo: Oceanfront*, 27.
[167] As quoted in Bourdon, *Christo*, 155.
[168] Christo In Fineberg, *The Gates*, 150.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.
[171] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence,"* 60.
[172] Fineberg, *The Gates*, 31-32; Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 215; Schellman and Benecke, *Prints and Objects*, 86.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Chernow, *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*, 235.

toward a more permanent aim.[175] Indeed, O'Doherty assumes this; he refers to their efforts as "preservation strategies". Should we interpret such extensive documentation as the artists' attempt to extend each work's existence, albeit in another form? If not the works themselves, then what do the artists hope to preserve? What motivates these activities, if not the pursuit of permanence? One factor, which makes it difficult to answer these questions with any certainty, is the inherent complexity of defining "the work" in question. The artists use the term to refer to multiple things, including the object that temporarily appears in the landscape and everything that forms part of the process leading up to the project's realization.[176] Christo made this clear at a public hearing for the *Running Fence* proposal: "'The work is not only the fabric, the steel poles and the Fence. The art project is right now here. Everybody here is part of my work it they want it or don't want it. […]'"[177] Therefore, the work seems to exist both as an independent object and relationally. The inclusion of these historically particular and temporally limited aspects is also consistent with the artists' view that every work has a "prime time", rather than a timeless or atemporal existence. Certainly, no one can return to the site and view the work as it once was. Yet not everything of the work disappears when it is dismantled, either: the land or buildings, which are part of the work's media, remain in the landscape unchanged; only the other, more ephemeral elements, are absent. In addition, there is not one work, but many; the films, photographs, and preparatory drawings are "works of art in their own right", as Vaizey noted.[178] While they refer back to the in situ work, they are also independent interpretations of it, each with its own potential for unique aesthetic engagement in the present. Perhaps then, the referential function of documentation, which Christo highlights, serves to facilitate a more robust understanding of the socio-historical context in which the work was created. In this sense, documentary records would reference the work as occurring in the past, rather than existing in a continuous present. Of course this "rational" explanation may still not adequately account for the meticulous attention they pay to it. O'Doherty suggests the reason for their archival attentiveness is far more personal. He states:

> The fear of the abyss that visits everyone from time to time attends their strategies. Most artworks desire immortality. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's

[175] As stated in video: Christo, "Why are Christo and Jeanne-Claude's Works Temporary?",
[176] Yard, *Christo: Oceanfront*, 26.
[177] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 63.
[178] Vaizey, *Christo*, 9.

> archives, however cool and rational they may be, passionately desire survival of the temporary works they document. […] So meticulous is the postmortem narrative that one has the outrageous thought that the work was made so it could pose for its extended afterlife, its postmortem immortality.[179]

Again, we are left to wonder whether O'Doherty's assessment has merit or is simply a reflection of his own concerns for aesthetic immortality as an artist.[180] Either a paradox or an inconsistency exists between the artists' philosophy and practice of creating deliberately ephemeral works and ensuring their long-lasting documentation. As noted earlier, Christo suggested the decision to make these works temporary was a "courageous" act, rejecting the surrogate immortality artworks are purported to provide. His easy dismissal of such seems to imply that personal immortality is not a driving concern. Indeed, his eternal "mind of humanity" is collective, not individual. Moreover, temporal limitations are innate to the work's reception. Although these ephemeral works are viewed by thousands of people, the public is not their intended audience; instead, the artists make the works for themselves and a few friends, who are also temporally limited:

> (Jeanne-Claude) We want to create works of art of joy and beauty, which we will build because we believe it will be beautiful. The only way to see it is to build it. Like every artist, every true artist, we create them for us.
>
> (Christo) We create those works for ourselves and our friends, and if the public enjoys it, that is only a bonus but that is not created for the public.[181]

Of course the nature and size of the works means that the public will easily see them, and, as we have seen, the artists do consider aspects of the public's aesthetic experience even if it is, in this respect, non-essential. However, the artists and a few friends are the work's primary audience. Since human finitude sets temporal boundaries to the period during which these intended viewers can experience the work, there is perhaps no need for documentation to ensure the work's "survival", as O'Doherty describes it. In addition, the documentary records perform a practical function for the artists: they provide a public relations mechanism, which is essential in gaining permission for future projects, and they assist the artists to control the

[179] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 65.

[180] Certainly he is conscious of artists' desire (in general) for immortality and frames his essay against a backdrop of this comment: "Sometimes it seems—as the earth journeys towards its frozen end—as if nothing will survive, apart from postnuclear fauna, but the egos of extinct politicians and the works of vanished artists." Ibid., 52.

[181] From an interview with James Pagliosotti as included on Christo and Jeanne-Claude's official website: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "An Interview with Christo and Jeanne-Claude."

future's perception of the works, by encapsulating the artists' interpretation of the work's "prime time". Perhaps the importance they place on a work's "prime time" fuels a desire to collect those documentary records that will provide a means by which to understand that period, and thus the work, in its temporal and socio-historical context more fully. Their careful selection of items for inclusion in each publication would seem to imply this. Since they insist there be no outside interference in the work's creative vision, it is likely that they equally would want to control the way the work is remembered, by ensuring an accurately transmitted account of its previous existence. Thus, while it may be difficult to definitely determine the artists' motivations for documentation, the patterns of practice appear to demonstrate less of a "fear of the abyss" as O'Doherty projected, and more of an attempt to enable the work to attain its lasting freedom in impermanence, through their retention of creative control.

III. a. iv. Concluding Observations: Intentional Ephemerality

What have we observed thus far? While the finitude of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's intentionally ephemeral works provokes varied responses, they are rooted in individual assumptions about the relationship between a thing's value and its permanence. Not only do disagreements arise over a temporary work's significance, but also over the relative importance of different facets of a work, especially those that are lost with its material disappearance. Documentation is widely viewed as able to communicate knowledge about a work, but the extent of its capacity to transmit "the work" in its fullness is regarded with greater diversity; nevertheless, the desire for the work to transcend its ephemerality seems to be a persistent concern for many. Because intentionally ephemeral art is deliberately staged finitude, its transience results primarily from temporal rather than material limitations. In this way, it has much in common with an event: its beginning and ending are imbedded in human and temporal particularities. These are aspects of the work that can be remembered, but not necessarily re-experienced. Because documentation is unable to retain all aspects of the original work of art the immortality it provides is limited to the particularities of the work that are independent of time, place, or direct experience. Intrinsically ephemeral works face similar issues; however, impermanence results from the innate qualities of the materials used by the artist rather than a deliberate decision to

terminate the work's existence. To examine aesthetic finitude of this kind we turn to the intrinsically ephemeral work of Andy Goldsworthy.

III. b. Andy Goldsworthy: Intrinsically Ephemeral Art

III. b. i. Artist Profile

Andy Goldsworthy is perhaps most well known for his ephemeral sculptures, although most people will never have the opportunity, except by chance, to encounter them in person; many, however, will do so through the photographs he takes of them, which appear in gallery exhibitions and in the published catalogues of his work, with which he is usually directly involved: the most recent of these is *Andy Goldsworthy: Ephemeral Works 2004-2014*.[182] Born in England in 1956, Goldsworthy has been actively exhibiting his work and engaging in artistic commissions since his student days in the mid 1970s.[183] During the decade preceding 1986, Goldsworthy made over 2,700 sculptures—a prolific practice that continues to this day.[184] Although he makes his home and works primarily in the United Kingdom, Goldsworthy has also created and exhibited his work elsewhere, including the United States, Holland, Japan, and the North Pole, among other locations.[185] Some of the works he creates are permanent, exhibited in museums, such as the "'clay helix'" he made for the Getty Center in 1997 (mentioned in chapter two), or outside, such as *Storm King Wall*, a serpentine stone wall that winds through upright trees toward a pond at the Storm King Art Center sculpture park in New York.[186] For these, he uses many of the same kinds of materials (those found in nature) that he does for his ephemeral works, although interior conditions or sculptural form (a wall instead of balanced stones) may afford them greater natural longevity.[187] However, it is his "ephemeral work", which Goldsworthy describes as "work made outside, for and about a day", that he considers

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[182] Andy Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy: Ephemeral Works, 2004-2014* (New York: Abrams, 2015).

[183] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, back flyleaf. Malpas, *Andy Goldsworthy: Touching Nature*, 1-2.

[184] University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, "About the Project," *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976-1986*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/about/.

[185] Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 5.

[186] Thomas F. Reese, "New Ruins," 25, 33; Storm King Art Center, "Andy Goldsworthy," accessed February 27, 2016, http://collection.stormking.org/artist/andy-goldsworthy/.

[187] See Paul Nesbitt, "Leafworks," in Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 99, 107-08.

the "core of [his] art".[188] It is through these intrinsically transient and temporary creations—a delicate spiral of icicle shafts rising from the ground ("*Icicle spire*", 8 January 1985 in Brough, Cumbria) or a golden panel of "*Sycamore leaves stitched together with stalks hung from a tree*" (Glasgow, 1 November 1986)—that Goldsworthy seeks to understand the individual natures of his media and the essence of nature as a whole.[189] He describes it in these terms: "The aim is to understand the nature of nature – not isolated materials."[190] About works made with stone, he writes:

> I had to forget my idea of nature and learn again that stone is hard and in so doing find that it is also soft. I tore leaves, broke stones, cut feathers…in order to go beyond appearances and touch on something of the essence.[191]

This aesthetic aim of *seeking to understand nature* is a repeated refrain throughout many of the artist's statements about his artistic practice. In one instance, he explains: "'Through my work I am trying to understand leaves'."[192] Moreover, his attempts to understand are never singular: he repeatedly engages with the same materials. For example, Paul Nesbitt notes that Goldsworthy "has worked with the Sycamore leaf for fifteen years […]."[193] The materials the artist employs are myriad and generally consist of those he finds on site in nature: sticks, leaves, snow, stones, ice, grasses, feathers, and earth, among others.[194] Goldsworthy, who generally does not use tools for his works' creation—"preferring to explore the natural bonds and tensions that exist within the earth"—engages in what can, perhaps, best be described as hands-on exploration of his media.[195] Moreover, in his creative process he responds to whatever natural circumstances are present: as he states, "The seasons and weather conditions determine to a large degree what I make."[196]

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[188] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 6. Image titles reveal that some works take longer than a day to construct.

[189] For image: University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, "1984_004," *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976-1986*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/image/?id=ag_03157&t=1.

[190] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 64.

[191] Ibid., 6.

[192] As quoted in Nesbitt, "Leafworks," 108.

[193] Ibid.

[194] See the extensive material list on: University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, "Browse the Catalogue," *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976-1986*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/browse/.

[195] Ibid., "Selected Extracts," *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976-1986*, accessed May 19, 2016, http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/extracts/.

[196] Ibid.

While Goldsworthy's ephemeral works are usually made in places to which the public has access, his artistic process is intensely private.[197] He usually works alone, assisted by others he knows, as necessary.[198] The artist then systematically photographs each work when it is completed: one view sees the work at a distance, framed by its context; the other is a close-up;[199] through these the public is given greater access and, thus, the opportunity to view his ephemeral works of art. The use of photographs helps Goldsworthy safeguard his preference for working alone by providing "a necessary barrier between the making and public viewing" rather than setting himself up as a "perform[ance]" for people to watch.[200]

III. b. ii. The Manifestation of and Rationale for Intrinsic Ephemerality

Goldsworthy is one of a numbers of artists who embrace, rather than resist or ignore, the intrinsic ephemerality of their materials. His frequent use of ice, leaves, grasses, and other naturally transient materials for his outdoor installation and sculptural work virtually guarantees their short existence, although the length of their duration will vary. In Yorkshire Sculpture Park he attached iris leaves to one another with thorns, filled selected sections with rowan berries and floated the green-latticed structure upon water.[201] Notwithstanding the ineluctable temporal limitations of organic matter, the setting also contributed to the work's short lifespan since fish and ducks found the sculpture irresistible.[202] Out of a "well rotted muck heap" in a field in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, Goldsworthy formed a conical cairn—a form that also frequently appears in his works made from stone.[203] Using small, thin tree branches and mud on two consecutive days, Goldsworthy wrapped the former around an approximately two to three foot span of a large tree branch which had fallen, before replacing the same section with a coating of dark mud—a stark contrast to the bough's pale grey bark.[204]

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[197] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.

[198] Ibid., 120.

[199] University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, "Photography," *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976-1986*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/photography/; Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Andy Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy* (London: Viking, 1990), n.p. (Photographs and caption text provide this information.)

[202] Ibid.

[203] Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 278. For examples of the latter see Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 34-41.

[204] Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 328-29.

He returned twenty days later to find the "fallen oak bough had been cut up and taken away" and painted a mud "shadow" to indicate its former resting place.[205] In another instance, the artist lay upon a large "fallen stragler fir tree [… in] Conondale National Park, Queensland" while it rained;[206] when he got up, a pale outline of his body remained visible due to the contrast of the dry bark with the rest of the tree, which had significantly darkened in color as it became wet.[207] As the rain continued, the "rain shadow" gradually disappeared.[208]

Subdividing the breadth and diversity of ephemerality that is manifest in Goldsworthy's works into distinct categories is a difficult, if not impossible task. Each unique manifestation of finitude results from the innate characteristics of the materials he uses and the circumstances in which the work is created. The browsing function of the *Andy Goldsworthy Digital Catalogue: Volume 1: 1976 – 1986* categorizes his works according to year, form, material, and place.[209] However, the identification of 27 forms and 40 materials does not provide adequate simplicity for fostering a fruitful discussion. Both form and medium affect the manner in which a work's ephemerality manifests itself and, therefore, provide myriad options for understanding it—too many, in fact. That said, there are at least three predominant ways in which aesthetic finitude occurs: through disappearance, through degradation, and through action. (Of course, these are overlapping categories in many respects.) We have already seen how Goldsworthy's rain shadows participate in the first. In "disappearance", there is a dramatic, sometimes sudden, visual transformation of a work: the work is wholly visible and then it is not. This manifestation of transience often occurs quite rapidly, resulting in the brevity of the work's visible lifespan, as was the case when "dust [was] swept and thrown to reveal a shaft of light" inside a branch-covered building in Ibitipcoa, Brazil on September 12, 2014.[210] Likewise, a smaller jagged rock balanced point-to-point upon a larger one, in Heysham Head, Lancashire in 1978, "soon fell", as the work's descriptive title and its second documenting photograph reveal.[211] Transience through "degradation", in contrast, may take more time to show itself. In

[205] Ibid., 332-33.
[206] See series of photo in ibid., 148-49.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.
[209] University of Glasgow Crichton Campus, "Browse the Catalogue."
[210] Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 330-31.
[211] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 104-05; "soon fell" is part of the descriptive title drawn from his notes.

one such work, red maple leaves, which are attached with clay, run along a long ridge of clustered rocks like spiny protrusions on the back of an imaginary stone dragon, and are enflamed to bright red by the sun.[212] Most likely made on the same day it was photographed (November 16, 1991 in Ouchiyama-Mura, Japan) this work's disappearance through decay will be gradual, a duration that depends upon the natural forces that dry leaves or scatter them.[213] Likewise, as the documenting photographs reveal, Goldsworthy's *Sand Stones*, formed from sand he dug and shaped into 12 boulders on Hope Ranch Beach, California on May 16, 1992, slowly crumble and are washed away with the incoming tide.[214] "Action" works, however, simply take the time necessary to complete them, whether that is a series of *Seawood Throws* on August 17, 2007 in Dumfriesshire or *Walking through a Hawthorn Hedge* longitudinally on April 30, 2013 in Hampshire.[215] Each of these actions appears "fixed" in the moment the camera captures; however, when the multiple photographs of the series are compared, they show the individual changes that result from these temporal performances.

Time is, therefore, a prominent aspect of Goldsworthy's work. Indeed, he states: "If I had to describe my work in one word, that word would be time."[216] Writing about *Snowballs in Summer*, whose individually unique contents were revealed as the snowballs melted, Goldsworthy states: "'[…] Each snowball is an expression of the time it was made.'"[217] The artist's "rain shadows" are similar expressions of temporality. Although their mode of creation and disappearance is remarkably simple, the context in which each shadow appears adds temporal complexity and uniquely contributes to the viewer's perception of time's passage. For these works, Goldsworthy lies down on a dry surface (pavement, dirt, grass); it rains (or snows) on him and the surrounding area. His body protects the area it covers from exposure to the rain. He gets up and a shadow outline of his body is visible, through the contrast of rain versus non-rain "colors". Whether the continuing rain merges the two into one, or the sun or wind dries the contrasting surface, the shadow's appearance is generally short-lived. However, the viewer's understanding of its temporality is affected by the setting—urban or rural, heavily populated or sparsely

[212] Ibid., 16-17.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid., 50-51.
[215] Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 44-45, 212-14.
[216] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.
[217] Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 117.

populated—in which the shadow occurs. Certain of Goldsworthy's "rain shadows" make us especially aware of time, through the visual juxtaposition of items with varying rates of transience. For example, the series of photographs that document a rain shadow made on the sidewalk at the intersection of 53rd Street and 7th Avenue in New York City show that even as the shadow changes, so does its context; the constant flow of passers by means that there is the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of persons and cars, which occur at a varying rate to the shadow's.[218] Likewise, in *Late Night Rain Shadow, Times Square, New York, 3 March 2010*, constantly changing advertising images appear on the screen above the rain shadow, calling attention to the ephemerality of both.[219] In contrast, in *Rain Shadow on a Recently Fallen Stragler Tree, Conondale National Park* only the shadow seems to change; the series of photos show the artist's and the shadow's appearance and disappearance, while the backdrop of surrounding trees and stones appear static.[220] The rate of a shadow's transience is, therefore, perceived relative to that of its context. Moreover, while the tree shadow image's background of other trees appears unchanging and permanent, we know from Goldsworthy's other works that it, in fact, is not. Instead the process of transformation through degradation occurs much more slowly; as a result, the evidence for its inherent finitude and impermanence is subtler.[221]

The ephemerality present in Goldsworthy's work, therefore, is intrinsic both to the materials he uses and, by default, to his aesthetic practice, which is concerned with understanding these materials and, through them, nature:

> I have an art that teaches me very important things about nature, my nature, the land and my relationship to it. I don't mean that I learn in an academic sense; like getting a book and learning the names of plants, but something through which I try to understand the processes of growth and decay, of life in nature. Although it is often a practical and physical art, it is also an intensely spiritual affair that I have with nature: a relationship.[222]

> I do not simply cover rocks [with leaves, mud, branches, etcetera]. I need to understand the nature that is in all things. Stone is wood, water, earth, grass …

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[218] Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 110-11.
[219] Ibid., 100-01.
[220] Ibid., 148-49.
[221] Of course, one could argue that since its elements are "recycled" into nature, it is not finite but permanent, albeit in a different form. Nonetheless, the background is not permanent in its current manifestation—the fallen tree will decay until it is no longer visible.
[222] John Fowles, Fumio Nanjo, and Terry Friedman, "Three Conversations with Andy Goldsworthy," in Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 164.

> I am interested in the binding of time in materials and places that reveals the stone in a flower and the flower in a stone.[223]
>
> […] My work is a growing, strengthening well of understanding at the heart of which is the ephemeral work.[224]

Hence, for Goldsworthy, the creative process that leads to knowledge is often more important than the longevity or durability of the object he creates. He explains: "'My sculpture can last for days or a few seconds — what is important to me is the experience of making […].'" I leave all my work outside and often return to watch it decay'."[225] Sometimes he facilitates these natural processes as part of his process of discovery: "If an [stone] arch does not collapse of its own accord, I sometimes weaken it so that it falls. I can learn as much by its destruction as from its making."[226] However, even without Goldsworthy's intervention, the arches only tentatively and temporarily defy gravity, held together by the tension of stone against stone or ice against ice.[227] Unlike the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, the source of ephemerality is primarily intrinsic, rather than intentional. The impermanence of his artworks naturally follows from the impermanence of his materials and, thus, does not reflect a deliberate pursuit of aesthetic impermanence more generally:

> That art should be permanent or impermanent is not the issue. Transience in my work reflects what I find in nature and should not be confused with an attitude towards art generally. I have never been against the well made or long lasting.[228]

He further describes this contingent relationship: "My works decay because nature decays."[229] Moreover, it also becomes clear that Goldsworthy believes he must participate in nature's transience in order to understand it; accordingly, his aesthetic interactions must be equally ephemeral. He argues: "These things [cycles of change in nature] are all part of a transient process that I cannot understand unless my touch is also transient — only in this way can the cycle remain unbroken and the process be complete."[230]

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[223] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 6.
[224] Friedman, "Monuments," 143.
[225] As quoted in ibid., 153.
[226] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 95.
[227] See examples in ibid., 94-99. See ice arches in Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 172-75.
[228] Goldsworthy, 'The Photograph," 9.
[229] Fowles, Nanjo, and Friedman, "Three Conversations," 168.
[230] Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy*, 3.

III. b. iii. The Response to Intrinsic Aesthetic Finitude

Given these factors, the fact that Goldsworthy's art is marked by aesthetic finitude is hardly surprising. Indeed, Andrew Causey argues that because "change and finiteness are principles of his art" Goldsworthy would be unconcerned even if his permanent earthwork at Lambton had to be destroyed to make way for a new railway.[231] As we have already seen, the artist's creative process is itself deliberately transient, mirroring that which he finds in nature. Hence, unlike the work at Lambton, his ephemeral works would remain largely unknown if Goldsworthy did not photograph them. Because he seeks privacy for his ephemeral practice, most viewers are never presented with the work in anything other than its two-dimensional form.[232] While the photograph is not the end goal of his creative process, it, nonetheless, forms an integral part of it.[233] Goldsworthy explains: "Photography is my way of talking, writing and thinking about my art."[234] Compositionally, the photograph shows those elements and relationships that Goldsworthy considered important to the work during its construction, including those features present in its context—such as, light, wind, or water—which bring the work to life.[235] There exists, therefore, in one sense, *two* works of art—the sculpture and its carefully composed photograph—which further complicates how we understand "the work's" finitude. Moreover, as Goldsworthy insists, the two forms are interconnected: "To interpret the relationship between the work outside and its image by deciding which is the art is too simple."[236] However, it is often only the latter that that others ever see. And, as Lenore Metrick aptly observes: "the photographs are emphatically not ephemeral."[237]

Thus, unlike Goldsworthy, the viewer knows his works of art only in a two-dimensional, permanent form. Their experience of the work is visual, rather than kinaesthetic. The photograph is their first mode of aesthetic encounter; they will likely know no other. For the viewer, then, the photograph presents an ephemeral work (or, a moment in that work's life) made eternal. It stands witness to the completed work,

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[231] Andrew Causey, "Environmental Sculptures," in Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 136.
[232] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.
[233] Goldsworthy, "The Photograph," 9.
[234] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Lenore Metrick, "Goldsworthy's Art as a Cultural Measure," in Schachter and Brockman, *(Im)permanence*, 172.

not the many hours of construction or subsequent process of decay.[238] While Goldsworthy experiences the work from its conception to its demise, the viewer only knows the work "when it is most alive."[239] Indeed, this is the moment that the artist expects the photograph to depict. What kind of aesthetic finitude does the viewer see? Does this two-dimensional record present life without death? Is the ephemeral work, thus, given aesthetic immortality?

Yet, to Goldsworthy, the photograph also displays finitude; it reveals time, rather than transcends it. He suggests that photographic image "roots itself in the moment when it was taken" and, as an ever-developing medium, cannot help but evidence time's passage: "Images that show us growing older will be further dated by the patina of a changing technology that will make today's colours look crude and grainy just as photographs of the past appear to us now. This is how it should be."[240] Certainly, some of the published images in which the artist is present with his works bear witness to the fact that he too has aged.[241] Moreover, the photograph exhibits other aspects of finitude. The photograph is limited in what it can convey: in regard to the work, Goldsworthy acknowledges: "The photograph is incomplete."[242] Goldsworthy's experience of the work is far richer than what visual perception alone communicates. He has touched the leaves, felt the wind, manipulated the snow and ice with his hands—all experiences, he argues, which are needed to "bridge" the distance between the "image and the work".[243] For these, the viewer will need to draw upon her previous encounters with nature.[244] In Goldsworthy's view, the photograph is not as "real" as "the work outside" and, therefore, cannot "replace[…]" it.[245] Its existence is adjunct, not primary. However, as Causey notes, it is the work's transience that precipitates the need for it.[246] Goldsworthy uses the photograph as the means by which he can evaluate the "success or failure" of his work afterwards: an

[238] Some publications include multiple images of the process of construction or a work's disappearance (rain shadows), although these are fewer in number.

[239] This is point at which Goldsworthy intends to show the work through the photograph. Goldsworthy, "The Photograph," 9.

[240] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.

[241] Compare images of the artist in ibid., 1 and Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 316.

[242] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Ibid. He states: "If the photograph were to become so real that it overpowered and replaced the work outside, then it would have no purpose and meaning in my art."

[246] Causey, "Environmental Sculptures," 125.

augmentation of his memory.[247] Yet without it, there would be nothing for others to see. Thus, William Malpas takes issue with the artist's diminishment of the photograph's connection to reality, since for most viewers they *are* his art: "the *photographs* of Goldsworthy's sculptures are *already* 'so real' that they have […] replaced his art."[248]

Therefore, the aesthetic finitude to which the viewer and Goldsworthy respond is unique to their individual perspectives. For the viewer, the work's finitude is conceptual rather than experiential. For Goldsworthy, it is primarily the latter. It is Goldsworthy alone who knows both the work in situ and its photographic record. Hence, while both Goldsworthy and the viewer acknowledge the transience of the work he creates, firsthand experience of its finitude is more or less limited to the artist. With the exception of those images that depict a work's destruction, the viewer, with only the photograph showing the work at completion, must imagine the exterior work's ephemerality. For the viewer, then, the work of art is the enduring photograph, even though she tacitly acknowledges the existence of the other, ephemeral work. It is perhaps for this reason that others seem unconcerned with the ephemeral work's finitude, except as an example of anomalous artistic practice within the broader tendency toward permanence in art. For example, one interviewer frames his question in this way by asking Goldsworthy whether it bothers him that his work is "very short-lived and transient by normal artistic standards."[249]

One final aspect of Goldsworthy's understanding of the works' finitude should be examined: that of their continuing presence in nature. Because the media Goldsworthy employs is native to the site of the work's creation, when the work degrades or disappears these materials simply return to the location from which they came. The work is, thus, both finite and eternal, in that its media both disappear and remain. The work "at its most alive" is no longer in existence; it cannot be viewed in its entirety, but something of that of which the work was composed is still there. Because it is both a work of art and a part of nature, the work exhibits two kinds of finitude. Goldsworthy's explications about his works reflect this complexity. Speaking about his work at the North Pole, he said: "It [the North Pole] belongs to no one — it is the earth's common — an everchanging landscape in which whatever I

[247] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.
[248] Malpas, *Andy Goldsworthy: Touching Nature*, 89-90.
[249] Fowles, Nanjo, and Friedman, "Three Conversations," 160.

made will soon disappear."[250] He expressed similar thoughts about a commissioned work for *Hampstead Heath* in the 1980s: "'I do hope they [his patrons] will understand it will be a response to the Heath, will be sensitive to the Heath and about the Heath. It will last for a very short time, nothing will be there after I have gone'."[251] In contrast, he acknowledged, "Fourteen years ago I made a line of stones in Morecambe Bay. It is still there, buried under the sand, unseen. All my work still exists, in some form."[252]

III. b. iv. Concluding Observations: Intrinsic Ephemerality

What have we observed? Artists who engage in the creation of intrinsically ephemeral works recognize and accept that the materials they employ will not allow their works to achieve permanence. This limitation is, however, generally regarded as secondary to that which the transient materials enable the artist to create. The use of intrinsically ephemeral materials results in the work's visual disappearance; however, as Goldsworthy's above comment alludes, because its media participate in the ongoing cycles of nature the work exhibits aspects of both transience and permanence. As with intentionally ephemeral art, documentation gives the work a form of aesthetic immortality, but does so at the expense of particularities, which thereafter must be imagined. In those instances in which the documentary photograph is the viewer's first and sole encounter with the work of art, the work's ephemerality is conceptual rather than experiential. In contrast, as is true of Goldsworthy, the artist uniquely knows both. Although we will not explore it further, this raises an interesting question regarding the particular effects of documentation on the awareness of aesthetic finitude: does it foster acceptance or denial?

IV. Conclusions

In conclusion, whether a work's ephemerality is the result of innate limitations or intentional intervention, ephemeral art highlights finitude. Yet while the life of ephemeral art is short, documentation is long. Through photographs, drawings,

[250] Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 74-75.
[251] Sue Clifford and Angela King, "Hampstead Heath and Hooke Park Wood," in Friedman and Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth*, 57.
[252] Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy,* 3.

eyewitness accounts, documentary films, and carefully crafted publications one is able to "return" to the work outside of its temporally limited existence. On the one hand, documentation appears able to provide the immortality that ephemeral works innately lack. On the other hand, it seems only able to offer these works a compromised form of existence; it requires a diminution in importance of certain particularities in order to succeed. Additionally, we have observed that artists who engage in the creation of ephemeral works do so consciously, oftentimes with the explicit desire to reflect experiential and material aspects of finitude that are intrinsic to humanity and the world it inhabits. Accordingly, their creative response exhibits acceptance, or at the very least, acknowledgement of limitations. In the next chapter we will consider the theological implications of these observations. How are acceptance or denial of aesthetic finitude a reflection of our acceptance or denial of human finitude? What are the consequences of both? Does this model of ephemeral aesthetic creation provide a pattern worthy of emulation in humanity's broader response to and understanding of finitude?

Chapter 4

Theological Reflections on Aesthetic Finitude

I. Human and Divine Relationships to Finitude

Matter, time, and bodies have always been sources of limitation for humans. In contrast, many of the attributes traditionally used to describe God have emphasized the divine being's absence of limitation: omnipotence, omnipresence, and immortality. The contrasting natures of these two realities are reflected in the theological conundrum of the Incarnation and the historic difficulties in resolving it. How can the finite and the infinite—two divergent natures—exist in one being, the person of Jesus? Some proffered explanations, which were later regarded as heresies, have denigrated the role of one in order to more fully accommodate the other. In its paradox, the Incarnation naturally raises the issue of what it means to be fully human. Humanity's responses to finitude (in all its forms) are, in part, answers to this question. Moreover, when these responses are viewed through the lens of a religious framework, they also may be seen as indicative of humanity's understanding of creaturely boundaries in relationship to the divine being and the divine creation. These responses to finitude have been marked by varying degrees of acceptance and denial. Of course, the "proper" degree of acceptance one should have is what usually prompts debate. When medical research seeks to expand its capacity for extending or creating life, or euthanasia is put forth as a valid option for ending it, the controversy is often spoken of colloquially in terms of "playing God": usurping a role that belongs only to the divine realm. In a similar way, Goldsworthy described "the line between working with rather than against nature" as "difficult to define."[1] Christianity, as well as other religious perspectives, has understood humanity's broader acts of usurp as rebellion against God or, more generally, as hubris. (The Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11 provides one example of this.) Viewed more charitably, usually through a non-religious lens, these limit-transcending actions are simply noble explorations of the boundaries of human finitude in order to discover which are fixed (if any) and which are movable. In this way, they seek to expand human capacity to reach its potential. Yet this is not to say that *all* attempts to extend life or address degradation

[1] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 49.

in the world should be considered as hubris when viewed through a religious lens. On the contrary, Alan E. Lewis suggests that many of these may be regarded as "Spirit-filled human mediations of God's own redemptive struggle against all that threatens and destroys creation and the creatures."[2]

Making art is a creative act and, like other similar activities, is a movement beyond what *is*, in the raw materials of its medium, to what *could be*. Hence, art, by its nature, surpasses certain given boundaries to arrive at something more; Trevor Hart refers to this as the "'added-value'" contribution of artistic activity.[3] Ephemeral art is unique in that, while it reflects this creative capacity for expansion, it also consciously retains aspects of "creaturely" finitude, which naturally impose limits on its longevity. This delicate balance between the two is obtained by prioritizing, and thus respecting, aspects of human experience that are marked by limits, while engaging in imaginative possibilities. Goldsworthy's ephemeral works display both of these characteristics: as works of obviously human origin, they are alterations of nature; yet they also remain subject to nature's processes. Goldsworthy describes this: "My art is unmistakably the work of a person—I would not want it otherwise—it celebrates my human nature and a need to be physically and spiritually bound to the earth."[4] Indeed, no one would mistake the elegant artifice of his creations for a natural occurrence; stones do not pile one upon another in perfectly decreasing size, nor do icicles arrange themselves in a starburst pattern between two ends of the crumbled interior section of a stone wall.[5] These artistic creations manifest their unnaturalness and, thus, exceed the innate boundary of their normal appearance. At the same time, however, Goldsworthy allows these creations to participate in the natural cycles of their environment, which will eventually cause their disappearance. His works are, thus, a temporary alteration, not a permanent one. They are ultimately subject to their intrinsic natural finitude and Goldsworthy readily accepts this.[6]

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[2] Alan E. Lewis, *Between the Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 427-28.

[3] Trevor Hart, "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth," in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*. Edited by Jeremy Begbie, 5.

[4] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 50.

[5] For images see the cover of ibid; Goldsworthy, *Ephemeral Works*, 198-99.

[6] While this is true overall, sometimes Goldsworthy struggles with this on a smaller scale. He notes that sometimes "Chance events such as a falling stone stack […] rising river […] can lead to a stronger work. I have to think beyond my first reaction that the work has been spoilt." Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 49.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's ephemeral works illustrate a similar approach; while they exceed what is, they also embrace finitude. In this particular instance, the artists model dual roles simultaneously: divine creator and human creature. The majority of the materials the artists employ are of human construction (fabric, rope, steel cables, buildings, etcetera), although they include elements of natural origin (land and water) as well. However, in these circumstances, the work's finitude results from a divine act of the artists. They give and take life and, thus, function in the role of Divine Creator much in the same way as God would.[7] At the same time, they and their works respond to and embody aspects of creaturely finitude. Indeed, their ephemeral aesthetic is born from the recognition that temporality marks much of life, in ways that could not be otherwise. Thus, they draw comparisons to instances of unavoidable transience, as it is present in the passing of childhood and death, or even in the occurrence of a rainbow. In all this, they reassert common experiences of finitude from the perspective of humans. Specifically, they emphasize temporal limits of particularity: those transient socio-historical as well as material realities in which their works are inherently imbedded as a result of their transience. Even their choice of medium reflects this commitment to expressing temporality; the artists state: "The work is in transition. It is passing through. Of course, the fabric is the principal element that translates that fragility, that vulnerability, the passing of our life, the going away without the arrogance of wanting to be immortal."[8]

In all these things, these artists demonstrate a ready acceptance of finitude by also recognizing the limits of documentation and not expecting it to achieve more than it is able. Goldsworthy describes the photographic record as " a sort of invitation to feel how that [his experience of the work] might have been";[9] but in this imaginative possibility, he also acknowledges its limits: in the photo "there are many qualities [of the work] left out".[10] For Christo and Jeanne-Claude, these projects are "a labor of love";[11] while documentation does not extend their existence, it allows each project to be accurately perceived for what it was: "We owe it to our projects to keep the records straight while we are still alive, to have resources of information for

[7] We have already noted a few exceptions to this, such as *Valley Curtain*, in which natural forces gained the upper hand. But even in this they exhibit an acceptance of creaturely limitations and allow its finitude to remain as is.

[8] In an interview with Molly Donovan: Donovan, *Vogel Collection*, 53.

[9] Fowles, Nanjo, and Friedman, "Three Conversations," 168.

[10] Ibid.

[11] In interview with Donovan, *Vogel Collection*, 47.

people to see."[12] It is notable that none of these artists object to the creation of permanent works of art; yet they equally allow for and embrace transience as part of them as well. By holding permanence and impermanence in tension in this way, they strike a balance between two extreme responses to transience, which Freud identified as strident denial or despondent resignation. Neither of these is apparent in these artists' approaches to their work's ephemerality. Indeed, the experience of creative joy in the midst of limitations might be a better descriptor. In her interview with the artists, Molly Donovan records Christo and Jeanne-Claude as saying "All our projects happen in an open, joyous way."[13] Goldsworthy notes that, at times, his creative process has been compared to children's play—an observation he admits is, in fact, accurate:[14] "Since having children of my own […] and seeing the intensity with which they discover through play, I have to acknowledge this in my work as well."[15] Through their embrace of aesthetic transience, the artists model an approach to finitude, which neither denies nor ignores it, but finds in it great value; this is a theologically helpful model for considering our response to human finitude more generally.

II. The Denial of Death and Aesthetic Finitude

While death was once highly visible and experientially prevalent, the contemporary world largely experiences death as an unexpected interruption, removed from the experience of everyday life.[16] This, Davies argues, creates the context for death to be ignored:

> Death is ignorable because it is relatively rare, just as toothache was once common and intrusive in daily life but is now relatively rare. Once death's presence occupied a high and frequent profile, with most families experiencing loss of members across a wide age range and living in communities with ongoing losses in other families.[17]
>
> Death's profile has now, however, withdrawn into the margins of active social life. It occupies the distant scene of older old age […]. Death occasionally

[12] Ibid.
[13] Donovan, *Vogel Collection*, 43.
[14] Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 6. He was initially "uncomfortable" with this because of the sense in which it made his work seem less serious by the association with play.
[15] Ibid., 6.
[16] Kellehear describes both ageing and dying as "marginalise[d]" or "out-of-sight": Kellehear, *Social History of Dying*, 211, 213. See also McGilchrist, *Divided Brain*, 432.
[17] Davies, *Theology of Death*, 177.

> intrudes from society's margins through accident or terminal illness for those "untimely" struck down in their prime or, even worse, as infants or children. Still, for the most part, death can be marginalized because it is already professionalized for the great majority by hospital and funeral directors. […Moreover,] death becomes socially ignored.[18]

So too is aesthetic mortality ignored or relegated to the margins of viewer awareness. Professionals attend to the conservation of works, which are often, through not always, taken out of circulation to undergo any preventive or restorative treatments. Thus, the conservation process is largely invisible. Occasionally, museums highlight examples of conservation at work, allowing viewers a glimpse of the "surgeon's operating theater"; but these usually serve to reinforce the assumption that the treatment will successfully extend the life of the work. Moreover, in an effort to protect vulnerable originals from further degeneration, display copies may be substituted.[19] As a result, the museum visitor is only further insulated from the decline or death of a work, even if a placard of text is posted nearby to indicate the substitution and reason for it. Even when it is acknowledged that the original no longer exists, replications of a work may still confuse the public. For instance, decades after World War II bombs had destroyed it, Kurt Schwitter's *Merzbau* (an interior installation, which incorporated the rooms of his Hannover, Germany home) was replicated for subsequent display in a museum based on three documentary photographs and "the memories of Schwitter's son".[20] In spite of the fact that signs indicated that it was a reconstruction, Ferriani notes that the work was often misunderstood by the public to be the original.[21] On the whole, the relative invisibility of conservation sets the stage for tragic and untimely deaths of works of art as the form in which aesthetic finitude suddenly and noticeably intrudes. Thus, the destruction of the Bamiyan valley Buddha statues in 2001 brought their existence into the public spotlight. Likewise, the more recent destruction of ancient architectural works by Islamic State (ISIS) in the Middle East, such as the Temple of Bel at

[18] Ibid., 178.
[19] Caple, *Conservation Skills*, 113.
[20] Ferriani, "Pass on an Idea," 93, 95.
[21] Ibid., 95.

Palmyra, became the focus of media attention.[22] Death is, therefore, news, rather than a common and expected occurrence.[23]

If death is "marginalized", it can also be denied.[24] Davies notes two particular forms of the "denial of death": secular and religious.[25] In the first, death lacks any "ultimate significance" since humans are no different from any other animal, and, thus, subject to the same natural processes which lead to their loss of existence.[26] Moreover, at death there will be no personal, experiential awareness of this loss; therefore, it can hardly be regarded as something that is of any real consequence.[27] Similarly, in the second, Davies indentifies those "who see death as a simple transition from the reality of this world to a reality of an afterlife with God" as equally participating in the denial of death.[28] The "tragedy" of death is ameliorated or robbed of its significance through an emphasis on the "ease of transition" between two realities.[29] Davies identifies both Mormonism and Spiritualism as variously engaged in this "redefin[ition] of death", just as the possibility of a similar danger exists within Christianity. For those for whom belief in the afterlife shapes how they interpret the finality of death, there is a risk of overemphasizing the promised negation of death's permanent consequences by focusing on the immediacy of "heaven" at the expense of acknowledging death's temporary but significant present-day effects, especially for the living.[30] Even within a system of belief that anticipates death's ultimate reversal, there are still losses that are not immediately rectified and passage to the latter reality is far from instantaneous or without previous suffering. For the religious person, therefore, failure to acknowledge how death significantly impacts the living, including oneself, can also be a form of death denial.

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[22] Dominic Bailey, "Palmyra: Islamic State's Demolition in the Desert," *BBC News*, October 5, 2015, accessed March 19, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-34294287.

[23] The BBC focused attention on a number of similarly destroyed works through their 10-part series *Museum of Lost Objects*, often including personal recollections from those who knew it well. In some ways, these articles are similar to memorial obituaries. Kanishk Tharoor and Maryam Maruf, "Museum of Lost Objects: The Temple of Bel," *BBC News*, March 1, 2016, accessed March 19, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35688943.

[24] Davies, *Theology of Death*, 178. Ernest Becker also focused on denial: Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

[25] Davies, *Theology of Death*, 178.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Of course, as we have seen in chapter one there are various views on the "immediacy" of what happens at death.

This danger has a liturgical and narrative parallel in the Church's observance of Christ's Passion through to Easter. Alan E. Lewis argues that to move too quickly from Friday's crucifixion to Easter Sunday's resurrection is to forget the harsh reality of the former and its parallel occurrence in our own lives; the resurrection as hope is only truly meaningful if the full weight of the "finality of our extinction" is felt.[31]

> The very function of Easter Saturday is to prevent the rubbing out of Friday and its grievous memories by the instant and overwhelming exuberance of Sunday. Easter Saturday says that Jesus was gone and finished, subjected to death's power for a season. […] God's victory over death, as the Christian gospel tells it, is not a matter of smooth survival but a new existence after nonsurvival […].[32]

He adds that the intermediary position of Holy Saturday between the Friday and the Sunday is essential to understanding our creaturely finitude as something good—"supplying proper and necessary edges to the fabric of our existence"—not as a shameful error to be remedied:[33]

> The Easter raising of the human, buried son thus ratifies and intensifies God's original affirmation of our creaturehood and its mortality. The resurrection of a corpse is the ultimate assurance that it is good to be bodily, carnal, temporal; and that God should say this resurrecting Yes to the human body only by first indentifying with that body in the grave confirms that it is good and fitting not only to be fleshly, but for our flesh to perish, to come to termination and decay.[34]

Thus, the model which this tripartite narrative supplies is one in which both death and resurrection are held in tension by the "*simultaneous*[…]" finitude and anticipation present in Holy Saturday.[35] Lewis describes it as

> that day between the days which speaks solely neither of the cross nor of the resurrection, but *simultaneously* remembers the one and awaits the other, and guarantees that neither will be heard, or thought about, or lived, without the other.[36]

Hence, the knowledge that Sunday will arrive is the hope that frames and re-interprets the believer's present-day Saturday experience. However, the concurrent recognition of the two means that neither is robbed of its full significance; at the same time, the

[31] Lewis, *Cross and Resurrection*, 428.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 408-09.
[34] Ibid., 408.
[35] Ibid., 4.
[36] Ibid.

fulfillment of the latter is recognized as lying outside of human power.[37] In the Gospel of John's narrative of the death and subsequent raising of Lazarus after he had spent four days in the tomb, we see a similar juxtaposition of definitive finitude with hope of divine intervention.[38] While the gospel does not delineate the reason for Jesus' response, it records "Jesus wept."[39] Those in attendance interpreted this as a sign of his deep grief: "'See how he loved him!'"[40] Death clearly results in a grievous loss. Yet, as the narrative unfolds, the reader realizes that Jesus already possessed two pieces of knowledge at that time: one, Lazarus was dead and second, he shortly would be raised to life. This expression of grief, thus, punctuates an account in which death retains its weightiness for humanity, while its ultimate authority over life does not go unchallenged. The narrative, of course, foreshadows the Easter Sunday resurrection of Jesus, but the central action of this story offers Lazarus only a temporary reprieve from death, although it is a foretaste of what will come. Finitude is still acknowledged as part of the present human experience. Therefore, in light of the entirety of the three-day story, Lewis' admonishes his readers to live an "honest, courageous, and abundant Easter Saturday existence through each remaining day or month or year until our earthly time is done."[41]

Moltmann, like Davies, similarly identifies a religious form of denial, which arises from focusing on "life after death" at the expense of the life lived now.[42] When life after death is perceived as solely important, engagement in this life is compromised.[43] Disengagement can take many forms but at its core is a failure to live fully within the "happiness and pain" that the present life affords.[44] Moltmann describes this "refusal to live" as antithetical to whom God is: "a 'lover of life'."[45] The danger arises when our experiences of a finite existence are devalued as inconsequential or unimportant; our engagement with them is then, likewise,

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[37] Lewis writes: "Our hope is for that 'eschatological surplus' after the fact and finality of our extinction, for new possibilities supervening upon discontinuity, a free gift from outside us and beyond us — a share, that is, in God's own triune life. This may in no way be confused with confidence in capacities within our own possession to thwart our blessed or cursed mortality." Ibid., 428.

[38] John 11: 1-44

[39] John 11:35 (NIV)

[40] John 11:36 (NIV)

[41] Lewis, *Cross and Resurrection*, 435.

[42] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1996), 49-50.

[43] "The notion that this life is no more than a preparation for a life beyond, is the theory of a refusal to live, and a religious fraud." Ibid., 50.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

diminished. Lewis argues that humanity's temporality and finitude are redeemed gifts, not curses; hence, they should be regarded as "very good" and embraced as part of our divinely-given creaturely existence.[46] He insists that to see the "evanescent beauty in our precarious dust- and grass- and flower-like existence, is fundamental to the Bible's anthropology." Indeed, Adam's hubris was located in his rejection of limits: "the temporality and dependence of his status as a creature".[47]

Moltmann also suggests there is an equally false "irreligious" response to death, which prevents one from fully experiencing this mortal life;[48] he argues that "suppressing the awareness of death" is simply to delude oneself and participate in "an illusion" that cannot offer a robust experience of living.[49] Hence, because death cannot be accepted, it is ignored. However, Moltmann insists that this life can only be fully lived when death is fully acknowledged: "We experience death with this entire life – we experience this life with its entire death."[50] Thus, when death is consciously anticipated, our actions and valuations reflect that knowledge. It is, as Moltmann argues, a life-altering recognition: "Everyone who lives with awareness knows too that death is not only *an* event in life: it is *the* event – and that our attitudes to life are attitudes to the death of this life of ours."[51]

Acceptance of death as integral to human existence, therefore, offers the opportunity for what Davies describes as "intensive living".[52] Moltmann suggests that even the anticipation of life after death need not prevent one from being "wholly present" in this life;[53] indeed, death properly recognized creates the possibility of experiencing life with "new depth".[54] This, he argues, is perhaps most apparent to those who have had a narrow escape from death;[55] acutely conscious of the losses it brings, they begin to see life through a new lens:[56] "We feel new-born, and experience life here, in all its uniqueness and beauty, with freshly awakened and sharpened senses. We then suddenly realize with a blinding awareness what living really

[46] Lewis, *Cross and Resurrection*, 434-35, 409, 414.
[47] Ibid., 409.
[48] Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 50.
[49] Ibid., 50-51.
[50] Ibid., 51.
[51] Ibid., 50.
[52] Davies, *Theology of Death*, 72, 107, 109, 172-73, 175-77.
[53] Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 50.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

means."[57] In a similar way, when the recognition of aesthetic finitude in an ephemeral work of art is given its full conscious weight, the viewer's experience of the work takes on new intensity and meaning. This, of course, is the basis for Christo and Jeanne-Claude's intentionally ephemeral aesthetic; it is also reflected in O'Doherty's observation concerning those aesthetic encounters that anticipate a work's disappearance: "Attention is enhanced by impermanence, senses are on full alert, remembering even as you perceive."[58] As a result of its imminent absence, the work demands the viewer's full attention. Yet even in such clear cases of aesthetic finitude, there is the possibility of denial. To dismiss this impermanence too readily—relying upon alternative forms of preservation without acknowledging their significant intrinsic limitations—denies a work's mortality and deadens the potential intensity of present aesthetic engagement. Without the real possibility of loss, there can be no sense of urgency. If impermanence is not really permanent—if documentation is truly a sufficient replacement for first-hand experience (as O'Doherty also claims)—then there is no real reason to engage with the original work when its surrogate will serve equally well. If ephemerality is only a temporary illusion, why bother now with the work at all? Admittedly, few would characterize the situation in such stark terms, but it is a legitimate conclusion one might draw.

However, when aesthetic finitude is allowed to be manifest and welcomed into human experience, it offers the possibility of intensive engagement through the recognition of mortality without denial. Leonard's "Strange Fruit", with its connection to death both in referent and permitted material finitude, embodies this possibility. Temkin, the museum's original curator for the work made this observation:

> I believe [this work] may be more alive for today's viewers than many of the objects that are apparently fixed and never changing. Sometimes it's great to get caught up in the fiction of forever and the fiction of certainty…. But sometimes we are ready to know that there can be beauty in cracks and in loss. Sometimes it is much more of a help to know that everything is changing, in some way dying.[59]

In past centuries, death was allowed to intersect all aspects of life;[60] it was not, as McGilchrist notes, relegated to the margins of human experience, but "was

[57] Ibid.
[58] O'Doherty, "*Running Fence*," 53.
[59] Temkin in Ferriani, "Pass on an Idea," 117.
[60] McGilchrist notes the Renaissance and nineteenth century as times during which the right hemisphere was dominant, which accounted for this fact. McGilchrist, *Divided Brain*, 432.

omnipresent in life and literature" as well as conversation;[61] moreover, it gave "life […] meaning".[62] He observes that there is greater tolerance, indeed acceptance, of transience in Eastern cultures where they "emphasise […] the value of what is fleeting".[63] As we have seen with both Buddhist sand mandalas and Japanese temples, religious beliefs both influence and reflect these assumptions.[64] But in the West, we are discomfited by the fact that life cannot be so easily "grasp[ed]" or "[held]".[65] Hence, the West largely finds "ultimate value […] only in the immutable, in what is eternally the same".[66] McGilchrist attributes these present-day differences to the relative cultural dominance of the left over the right brain hemisphere's interpretation of reality in the West.[67] More will be said about this in the next section; however, it is worth noting that the left-brain operates under the illusion of "human omnipotence."[68] In such a context, transience and loss of "control" are perceived as intolerable.[69]

Denials of both human and aesthetic finitude can hinder our ability to fully engage with both life and art in the present. If McGilchrist's assessment of left-brain dominance is correct, then the trajectory followed by science and conservation in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in overcoming finitude is hardly surprising. One would, therefore, expect to find artists who pursued projects rooted in transience and limitations encountering cultural resistance, while others took advantage of new developments in preservation. Just as artists can be found at the front edge of what is or what will be a dominant cultural trend, they can also, at times, be out of step with or counteracting it. We have seen how some artists have engaged in the pursuit of immortality and permanence, while others have emphasized its elusiveness. It is the latter, which offers a corrective to human hubris and an opportunity to discover the full riches of human existence that lie within its creaturely boundaries. Concerning the quest for immortality, Nussbaum writes:

> There is a kind of striving that is appropriate to a human life; and there is a kind of striving that consists in trying to depart from that life to another life.

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 453-54.
[64] Indeed, McGilchrist insists that we need "myths or metaphors" such as these to "understand[…] the world and our relationship with it" so that we may flourish as humans; otherwise we will relapse into a view of ourselves as only "machine". Ibid., 441-42, 53-54.
[65] Ibid., 453.
[66] Ibid., 454.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 440.
[69] Ibid., 432.

> This is what [the Greek concept of] *hubris* is—the failure to comprehend what sort of life one has actually got, the failure to live within its limits (which are also possibilities), the failure, being mortal, to think mortal thoughts. Correctly understood, the injunction to avoid *hubris* is not a penance or denial—it is an instruction as to where the valuable things *for us* are to be found.[70]

Indeed, Lewis argued for the recognition of, and not resistance to, human temporal finitude as the most fitting and beneficial approach to this life.

> That same acceptance and enjoyment [of "our mortality"] applies equally to temporality; for it is to creatures of time that God promises resurrection of the body. The gospel hope of everlasting life does not negate our temporal finitude […]. Rather, the raising of God's eternal Son, who entered time for us and lived his life of glory for forty days upon the earth, signifies the redeeming of our time. Scripture's dream that everything dissipating and decaying, tormenting and demonic, about time shall pass away at last is the affirmation of created temporality along with the bodies in which we live in time.[71]

III. Being Fully Human

One of the innate ironies of the desire to preserve ephemeral art is that many of the artists who create these works intend to facilitate the recovery, or at the very least the recognition, of certain aspects of human experience which are bounded by finitude and transience, including that which is inherent to matter and embodiment. These limitations have, however, not necessarily been regarded negatively but rather as part and parcel of what it means to live as a human. We have already explored examples of some of these artistic creations in chapter three, although this pursuit is not limited to the category of ephemeral art. For example, we saw that Kaprow intended the "Happenings" to mirror the unpredictability and unrepeatability that was present in ordinary life. Similarly, Ferrriani notes that when Kaprow "re-presented his 'Environments'" they were intentionally never the same.[72] Those who participated in these installations, "by interacting with the space activated by the artist, would on each occasion give it a new configuration."[73] Change and singularity, like the rest of life, were intrinsic to these aesthetic practices and, therefore, unable to be exactly replicated. In other instances, artists have sought to engage viewers as fully embodied persons. Hence, installation art very often deliberately involves the entirety of the

[70] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 381.
[71] Lewis, *Cross and Resurrection*, 435.
[72] Ferriani, "Pass on an Idea," 102.
[73] Ibid.

human body (and its senses) as its proprioceptive mode of aesthetic reception. Of course aesthetic perception always requires the use of at least one sense—traditionally, that of sight or hearing, but installation art usually calls for the participation of most, if not all, of the senses. Alternative forms of preservation are disadvantaged in their ability to duplicate this immersive experience. Thus, Christo described the failure of a documentary photograph to communicate the dynamic nature of a work's fabric as experienced in person: "The fabric is not static. It is very difficult to convey this by looking at photographs. People should see the films. Our projects are moving in the wind like living objects."[74] Of course, mortality is another significant aspect of our humanity that artists have expressed; Leonard's refusal to allow *Strange Fruit* to be chemically preserved derived from her desire that the ephemerality of the work would match the commonplace experience of grieving. Each of these artworks, in their own way, focuses attention, both intentionally and inadvertently, on the full experience of being human, which includes interacting with the world through a body, experiencing limitations, and dying. In many ways, installation art and conceptual art stand at opposite ends of this practice; the latter resorts to the intellection of ideas as its sole mode of aesthetic engagement, in which embodiment and even matter are irrelevant.

In his insightful tome on the individual roles and cultural influence of the brain's right and left hemispheres, McGilchrist delineates "two ways of being in the world, both of which [are] essential."[75] The first is to "allow things to be *present* to us in all their embodied particularity, with all their changeability and impermanence, and their interconnectedness, as part of a whole which is forever in flux."[76] The second is "to step outside the flow of experience and 'experience' our experience in a special way"; this is "to *re-present* the world in a form […] which is more useful for manipulation […]: this world is […] abstracted [and…] lifeless".[77] These two modes of engagement are, generally speaking, the purviews of the right and left hemispheres, respectively.[78] While functionally both hemispheres are necessary, the ideal relationship between the two is "asymmetr[ical]": a "Master and his emissary".[79] In Western culture, McGilchirst argues, the latter has usurped the former: it is the left

[74] In Donovan, *Vogel Collection*, 53.
[75] McGilchrist, *Divided Brain*, 93.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 13-14.

hemisphere that currently wields the greater present-day influence.[80] In part, the result is a devaluation of embodiment as an integral and critical aspect of our humanness. McGilchrist explains:

> There has, in my view, been a tendency to discount and marginalise the importance of our embodied nature, as though it were something incidental about us, rather than essential to us: our very thinking, never mind our feeling, is bound up with our embodied nature, and must be, and this needs to be acknowledged.[81]

Moreover, because the left hemisphere operates in the realm of abstracted omnipotence, its "optimism is at odds with recognising the inevitable transience of the body, and its message that we are mortal."[82] Not only does the left hemisphere reject "*our* bodies", but also "the embodied nature of the world around us."[83] Yet these aspects of human nature and creation are both important to our humanity and theologically significant, especially when we consider that the Incarnation represents God's (who is spirit, unlimited, and immortal) intentional entry into that experience. Additionally, if, as some theologians argue, the new creation exhibits a significant amount of continuity with present experience, then we would expect that certain peculiarities of being human would be retained in it. Although there is dispute over which aspects will continue, a number of biblical scholars and theologians suggest that embodiment and temporality are two of these that will. Polkinghorne, for instance, insists: "The new creation will not be a timeless world of 'eternity', but a temporal world whose character is everlasting. (It will contain music, that specifically temporal form of art.) Just as it is intrinsic to humanity that we should be embodied, so it is intrinsic to humanity that we are temporal beings."[84] Similarly, in making his case for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, N.T. Wright argues from Pauline writings and the history of the early church, that the Church's expectation has always been that resurrected believers would possess bodies, albeit transformed ones.[85] Wright states:

> early Christians envisaged a body which was still robustly physical but also significantly different from the present one. If anything – since the main difference they seem to have envisaged is that the new body will not be

[80] Ibid., 6, 14. See pages 428-62 for his assessment of what a world with a solely dominant left hemi-sphere would look like and instances of such in present-day culture.
[81] Ibid., 439.
[82] Ibid., 20, 440.
[83] Ibid., 440.
[84] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 117.
[85] Wright, *Resurrection*, 359-60, 68, 72-73.

> corruptible – we might say not that it will be *less* physical, as though it were some kind of ghost or apparition, but more.[86]

Moreover, he argues that this expectation reaches even further back into history: it was also held during the period of Second Temple Judaism.[87] Since death was understood as "anti-creation, anti-human, anti-god", bodily resurrection was necessary to accomplish its "*defeat*".[88] If death were permitted a permanent alteration of the good "created order", which included the human body, then the enemy would have achieved victory;[89] therefore, "To allow death to have its way – to sign up as it were, to some kind of compromise agreement whereby death took human bodies but the creator was allowed to keep human souls – was no solution […]."[90] Polkinghorne agrees with this view on the grounds that anything less than re-embodiment (albeit a transformed body in a "new environment") is an insufficiently human existence:[91] while he acknowledges the post-mortem possibility that only a person's soul "is held in divine memory after […] death" he argues that such "would be less than fully human."[92] Instead, bodily resurrection can be expected on the basis of Christ's resurrection as "the foretaste and guarantee" of this.[93] A future that reasserts bodily existence cannot denigrate its importance in the present.

Not all hold these views: Polkinghorne notes Wolfhart Pannenberg's rejection of temporality as necessarily continuous;[94] Lewis eschews the "myth of the immortal soul", which discards the body, but he qualifies the expectation of resurrection in terms of a "future 'spiritual body'" rather than a "physical" one.[95] He explains:

> Hope is still for the "the body", not the soul, for the *person*, that is who is now identified with and through the physical body, even though that identity, beyond death, will be held in being without the scaffold, so to speak, of physicality.[96]

Regardless of whether the resurrected life will involve physical embodiment of the kind that Wright and Polkinghorne describe, this present life most certainly does, as

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[86] Ibid., 476-78.
[87] Ibid., 727-728.
[88] Ibid., 727.
[89] Ibid., 727-78.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 107.
[92] Ibid.,107-108.
[93] Ibid., 108.
[94] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 117-18.
[95] Lewis, *Cross and Resurrection*, 434.
[96] Ibid.

McGilchrist and Lewis both emphasize. While McGilchrist makes no particular theological claims, Lewis does. Embodiment and temporality are divinely given aspects of our present nature as creatures—our way of being in the world, which was also taken on in the Incarnation, and provides good and beneficial limits to our existence.[97] The recognition of aesthetic finitude provides one opportunity to take these realities into account. If ephemeral art (and art, in general) were allowed to fully express its finitude it could foster a recovery of the importance of embodiment and temporality, among other aspects, to the experience of being human. What is the human experience like? It is filled with limitations, continuities in temporary immortalities and, sometimes, when viewed through a religious lens, with intimations of the possibility of a true one. Art both mirrors and embodies these. Hubris, as Nussbaum alludes, is the failure to recognize that the life that one has—"with its limits (which are also possibilities)"—is also good.[98]

The easy acceptance of surrogate forms of documentation as replacements for a work's original manifestation devalues those particularities, which contribute to a work's finitude—whether materials, location, or temporality. Aesthetic finitude, therefore, concerns not only art's mortality and the loss of a work's existence, but also those aspects of a work that take into account our limitations in the manner of its aesthetic reception. To admit art's finitude is to admit our own. In his commentary on Goldsworthy's permanent environmental sculpture, *Seven Spires*, which is located in Grizedale Forest, Cumbria, Causey acknowledges those limitations that make both his text and the accompanying photographs insufficient encounters with the work. Constructed of leftover timber, these seven stretched-pyramid forms rise to the sky in and alongside other pine trees:

> *Seven Spires* is part of the forest and not, like most sculpture, either distinct from its surroundings or to be looked at only from the outside. One spire is easily visible from the track and its prominence signals the presence of the whole work. But to find the other spires and experience the sculpture in its entirety the viewer must leave the track and walk in among the trees.[99]

Neither set of photographs, which depict the work for the reader, enables this kind of proprioceptive experience. The first, two overlapping images, attempt to take in one spire's ascending height, but to do so must cut off any view of the greater

[97] See ibid., 407-14.
[98] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 381.
[99] Causey, "Environmental Sculptures," 127.

surroundings and the other spires. The second, the view taken from outside and at a short distance from the sculpture, attempts to see the whole, but again the documentary medium is limited in what it can contain. Consequently, all that these images extend is partial visual access to the work for the remote viewer. As Causey states, "the life of the large works [such as the *Spires*] is there in the landscape and nowhere else."[100] Thus, their size and site-specificity require that an embodied viewer be present in the landscape to which they relate. In addition, these works "exist in time" in that they are "subject to […] changes" such as "land use" or natural degradation that will affect their permanence.[101] Yet their beauty is found within, not without, these limitations.

IV. The Mortality *or* Immortality of Art?

As a result of the ephemeral works by artists such as Leonard or Christo and Jeanne-Claude, among many others, aesthetic transience has become more acceptable or, at the very least, not as unusual in contemporary artistic practices. Meanwhile, curators are learning how to allow some manifestations of transience in works of art under their care, although the desire to preserve works, more generally, remains constant. As we have seen in previous chapters, both mortality and immortality have been variously asserted for art. Certainly, persistent material finitude makes a strong case in favour of the former, at least in regard to the work's physical existence. Thus, the corrective Schwartz proffered in 1996 recognized this reality over and against a "myth of artistic eternity."[102] Two decades later, conservation has, perhaps, attained greater recognition of its limits and the competing voices that influence it, although the overarching drive to preserve remains persistent, in spite of acknowledged contemporary aesthetic complexities.[103] Therefore, works of art that are consciously ephemeral and works by artists who knowingly make little or no effort to consider long-term durability still present challenges for those who desire their preservation. Yet whether the immortality sought is individually "provisional", as Storr suggests is the only goal conservation can achieve, or the perpetuation of universal and timeless

[100] Ibid., 125.
[101] Ibid., 127.
[102] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.
[103] For instance, through *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, Muñoz-Viñas offers a more nuanced theory of conservation practice, which recognizes that the reasons for conservation are varied and can, thus, be in conflict with one another.

beauty, truths or insights that will continue to influence future generations, it aims to hold finitude's powers at bay.[104] (The latter pursuit of immortality is what Steiner suggests shaped the pattern of artistic practice in Western civilization until its erosion in the latter half of the twentieth century;[105] however, it is still present to an extent in today's preservation of cultural heritage.) Within this second understanding of immortality is a recognition that, while art may be finite or mortal, there is *something* of or in art that also points toward something which is lasting, even eternal. Art, therefore, appears to manifest two realities, which do not seem easily reconcilable: mortal and immortal, impermanent and permanent, transient and enduring. In various ways, art demonstrates both of these, depending upon how they are defined. How then does one resolve the tension of realities seemingly at odds with one another? On which should we focus?

Many of the responses to aesthetic finitude that we have examined thus far have been made without consideration of religious implications: in other words, the framework or perspective through which finitude is approached is primarily non-religious. While there are those who consider how art might offer a foretaste of eschatological reality and others who attempt to delineate its place in eternity, the majority who engage with works of art—especially in the field of conservation—reflects on the mortality and immortality of art without regard to either of these. Thus, art's preservation is pursued, for the most part, in light of what Scheffler proposed as the assumed existence of a non-religious afterlife: a "collective immortality". The past is preserved and the future influenced through those activities that attend to these concerns in the present; this greater continuity is what gives these otherwise limited and futile contributions meaning. In other words, one must save works for the future in order to save the past as well as the present, which will one day join its ranks. Thus, what often appears, at first glance, as only a desire for the immortality of the art works, is also a desire for the surrogate immortality of the persons those artworks represent. It the absence of any true personal continuity, this is the next best alternative. We can see how these unconscious motivations are subtly present in Jan Schall's expression of angst over the inherent difficulties of contemporary art conservation. Schall states: "The thought that the distant future might never know some of the finest art of our era, which can be found in museums, galleries and natural

[104] Storr, "Immortalité Provisoire," 37; Steiner, *Bluebeard's Castle*, 70-71.
[105] Ibid., 72. He wrote this in 1971.

sitees [sic] around the world, is almost unbearable."[106] Since the works are tangible expressions of their creators' thoughts and desires, their persistence into the future provides the necessary affirmation and continuation of persons. The curator becomes mediator of this immortality. Schall concludes:

> The visions, provocations, experiments, insights, dreams, fears and joys of this modern and contemporary world deserve to be known by people of the future. That is why curators are doing everything in their power to ensure that it is possible.[107]

Schall writes that these aesthetic expressions of discovery and hopes "deserve to be known".[108] Her choice of terminology suggests that it is, in actuality, the permanent loss of the humanity (the valued creators who deserve continuation) behind each individual and temporal artistic manifestation against which the curatorial profession labors; these lives remain meaningful in the future by the perpetuation of their valued contributions.

Yet the valuation that determines a work's chance of perdurance is also culturally and historically relative, rather than immutable or eternal. (Consequently, the same will be true for the artist.) Some, like Schwartz, attempt to reassert art's mortality due to matter's inherent limitations and advise rejection of false hopes of immortality, while others, through their actions and presumptions, perpetuate the pursuit of art's immortality—or, at the very least, its apparent capacity to preserve the ephemeral, whether an individual, a culture, or a moment. As we have seen, both are valid aesthetic observations, but within a closed (non-religious) approach to finitude and immortality. Without an alternative framework from which to view and respond to aesthetic mortality and immortality, it is likely that the pendulum will continue to swing between the two in an effort to resolve their inherent tension. For understanding and responding to finitude as manifest in religious ritual art practices, the Buddhist framework provided one such alternative. That which was eternal existed in a non-material realm and did not require material perdurance. Similarly, in Hegeman's proposal of a specifically Christian alternative, art would be given its eternal longevity in the New Creation; in this way, art's apparent mortality would be undone. This view, of course, maintains the equation of permanence and value in relation to

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[106] Jan Schall, "Curating Ephemera: Responsibility and Reality," in Schachter and Brockman, *(Im)permanence*, 24.

[107] Ibid., 25.

[108] Ibid., 25.

the artwork's individual immortality. Yet even this proposal does not resolve all difficulties. For instance, how would intentionally ephemeral works (that are not performative and not repeatable) find a place within this future without contradicting their transient nature? Or, are they instead of no true value?

While there is some value in trying to resolve this tension between aesthetic mortality and immortality, it is the irresolution of these that offers a far richer theological contribution. Hence, we will instead ask what these simultaneous conditions of art, viewed as a whole, contribute to our understanding of the religious framework itself. What do they reveal about our human situation, as framed by this religious perspective? What can be gained by accepting *both* art's persistent and ineluctable mortality, and its attestations of immortality?

IV. a. Mortality and Immortality in Tension

Perhaps no two images viewed in conjunction more aptly capture aesthetic mortality and immortality in tension than the photographs found on the front and back covers of Goldsworthy's 1994 publication, *Stone*.[109] On the front piece three towers of balanced stones emerge from the waters of Talisker Bay, Isle of Skye; each tower begins with large boulders at its base and then rises with stones in ever-decreasing size to its pinnacle, which culminates with pebbles. It is the precarious stability of their structures that renders them remarkable and the mind easily imagines the delicate tension with which they remain miraculously upright. Yet, in the photograph, they appear stable and unchanging—eternal. Moreover, we only see stillness; we do not hear the lapping of the waves or the sounds of the wind, although we see evidence of their presence. Instead, there are three immobile and permanent stone towers, given immortality through the image on the book's cover. The back cover image, however, dashes that illusion of permanence. The photograph, *Balanced rocks brought down by the incoming tide*, shows their moment of collapse, with one tower having already fallen, and the second about to knock down the third. But again, we hear nothing of the crash. Even the moment of collapse (*moments*, in actuality) is itself removed from time; all sensory markers of temporality, except for limited visual references, are no longer available to us directly. This indubitably transient moment appears strangely

[109] Goldsworthy, *Stone*.

unchanging and eternal—an action frozen in time or, rather, out of time. Lenore Metrick aptly describes this aspect of immortality produced by such images:

> We know the sculptured object's fragile nature, that it will soon collapse or blow into disarray, but Goldsworthy's photographs generate a sense of sustained perfection, a step outside of linear time. In his depictions, nature transcends the local and the momentary. They offer this fragile perfection as a permanent moment, a moment transcending the inevitable life cycle.[110]

We are left with two realities in tension: Are the stone towers lost or preserved? Do we witness immortality or finitude? Or both?

IV. b. Persistent and Ineluctable Finitude

The answer to the above question depends upon the viewpoint from which the inquiry is made. If we imagine a series of viewpoints, which occupy expanding concentric circles, we might trace a thread of persistent finitude running through any hint of immortality that might be present. In the first, innermost circle is the *ephemeral artwork* itself. Its "ephemeral" label already acknowledges its transience. In the second is the image of the ephemeral artwork, as contained in the photograph. The *transient work is now preserved in a non-transient state.* The photograph gives the viewer permanent access to that which is ordinarily ephemeral. This is the perspective that Metrick's observations highlight. Bauckham similarly notes it in his commentary on Monet's water lily and Rouen Cathedral series.[111] Likewise, it is evident in the practice of taking photographs during celebrations and other significant events. Yet if we move one step further outward, we are presented with the *transience of the mode of preservation* and our hold on that immortality becomes unstable. It becomes apparent that the book itself, on which the photograph appears, is made of perishable materials; already the cover is damaged and the images are slightly discolored and faded. Access to the preserved ephemeral moment is limited by the general finitude of the material world. If we move to the next circle we realize that the viewer, who observes the images, is herself finite; hence, her memory and gaze are also temporally limited. Thus, *individual perception is transient*. These circles might be extended even further to the potential end of the universe (and human existence) to consider those implications for aesthetic immortality. (This is the viewpoint Carey took in

[110] Metrick, "Goldsworthy's Art," 178-79.
[111] See Bauckham, "Time, Eternity and the Arts," 22-28.

response to Steiner's assertion of the latter. He held belief in the immortality of art to be nonsensical in light of "the eventual annihilation of all living species, including the human" as well as the universe they inhabit.)[112] Seen through these concentric lenses, finitude repeatedly encroaches upon humanity's experiences of perdurance.

V. Possible Responses to Aesthetic Finitude

In the specific responses to aesthetic finitude that we have examined thus far, three common practices have been evident: to overcome, to ameliorate, or to accept finitude. When these three approaches are examined through the religious framework of Christianity, we discover that what is gained and lost by each is theologically significant. This is true to an even greater extent when mortality and true immortality are held in tension; this is accomplished by keeping the latter in mind as one responds to finitude.

V. a. Overcome Finitude

The pursuit of aesthetic permanence has been a persistent practice in the West. This is primarily made manifest in attempts to render a work's original physical materials more durable, and when that fails or is not possible, to provide alternatives. On the whole, however, the work's destruction is perceived as something to be avoided. Positively, this pursuit often accompanies a concern to make sure that people and their contributions to humanity are acknowledged, not forgotten or devalued. For example, artist Judy Chicago acknowledges that she has made a concerted effort to ensure her work will endure: "In fact, permanence has been uppermost in my mind throughout my career, the result being that I always take care to consider and research the long-term consequences of materials and have great concern for the ultimate disposition of my work."[113] Her efforts are motivated by the recognition that the contributions of women have been frequently overlooked; therefore, she has sought to help rectify that cultural omission through her own work. While Chicago readily recognized the difficulty of the task, there is no other means by which it might be accomplished, at least in human terms. Negatively, the pursuit can descend into hubris, whereby one is

[112] Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* 148.
[113] Chicago, "Hope Springs Eternal," 149.

unable to recognize the impossibility of such a task for finite beings in a finite world, thereby denying the reality of human limits.

Within a biblical anthropology in which *all* (including the marginalized) matter there is much to be commended in her and others' similar pursuits. The preservation of absent cultures through their artifacts is another positive expression of this quest. Although its success is temporally limited, such preservative actions uphold the enduring value of others, especially of those who cannot do so for themselves. Yet even when hubris is not evident, weariness resulting from incessant obstacles to its achievement may be instead. Christianity similarly affirms the worth of persons' continuation, although its permanent solution lies beyond the reach of human hands. Moltmann addressed the issue of human incapacity and the positive desire for perdurance in his explication of the Christian hope:

> On the one hand there is nothing to which we can hold fast, not even ourselves. Everything passes away. We came naked into the world and naked we shall leave it. Death is the finish.
>
> But on the other hand, nothing at all is lost. Everything remains in God.
>
> With God, we mortal beings are immortal, and our perishable life remains imperishably existent in God. We experience our life as temporal and mortal. But as God experiences it, our life is eternally immortal. Nothing is lost to God, not the moments of happiness, not the times of pain. "All live to him" (Luke 20.38).[114]

V. b. Ameliorate Finitude

Of course in many instances the loss of the work is recognized as unavoidable; at which time, amelioration of the consequences of finitude becomes the preferred course of action. This is accomplished by minimizing those particularities, which contribute to the work's finitude, while elevating those that allow for its persistence. Often, the "idea" of the work is made primary at the expense of its materiality. Malpas' suggestion that "[e]arth/land art" (such as that of Christo and Jeanne-Claude or Goldsworthy) is also "Conceptual art" because it requires another "art [form such as the photograph] to 'exist'" is, in part, a rejection of the ephemeral work's finitude by envisioning the photograph as its means of continued survival.[115] Although

[114] Moltmann, *In the End*, 108.
[115] Malpas, *Andy Goldsworthy: Touching Nature*, 49-50.

Goldsworthy acknowledges that without the photographs there would be no discussion of his art, he is eager that they not surpass it and "become more real" than the ephemeral work or the latter would lose all significance and meaning.[116] As Maplas's observation indicates, in order to mitigate the work's finitude, that which is regarded as enduring in the work is perceived to be independent of those material properties, which partly make it the work that it is. Often, matter or the work in situ (where this is a factor) must be denigrated as not of primary importance for the work to endure.

Permanence often comes at the cost of the work's singularity. Walter Benjamin framed "genuineness", which cannot be reproduced, in terms of particularity:

> The genuineness of a thing is the quintessence of everything about it since its creation that can be handed down, from its material duration to the historical witness that it bears. The latter (material duration and historical witness) being grounded in the former (the thing's genuineness), what happens in the reproduction, where the former has been removed from human perception, is that the latter starts to wobble. Nothing else, admittedly; however, what starts to wobble thus is the authority of the thing.[117]

Of course such distinctions have little currency with art that requires only the transference of an "idea". Replications bestow immortality by dispensing with temporal particularities; genuineness, removed from the experience of history, is attached to a certificate, which delineates the boundaries of the work's idea. Yet works need not be conceptual art to participate in this process of circumventing finitude. In every instance in which documentation takes the place of the work, a transposition occurs through which certain aspects of the work are not retained; in so doing a judgment is made as to which aspects of the work and the viewer's engagement are essential, and which are incidental. In many cases, the importance of the embodied viewer's experience (as manifested in the physical relation of the viewer to the original in situ work) is minimized in order to retain other aspects, including the visual representation of the work as a whole. Thus, the scaled down images published in *The Snow Show* catalogue provide hand-held access to the work for the geographically and temporally dislocated viewer. This practice is not limited to ephemeral works of art, but also occurs with permanent works of which the original

[116] Ibid., 89; Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 120.
[117] Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 7, 10, 38.

still exists. Hence, one can either view Picasso's original painting, *Guernica*, at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, or buy a poster of it.[118] Indeed, many museum shops routinely sell prints and postcards of well-known works of art. In one sense, one is able to "take a work home with them". The Google Cultural Institute's online gallery offers digital reproductions of many of the world's museum holdings and includes a zoom function that allows further examination of details, albeit limited by the size, resolution, and color accuracy of the individual's computer screen.[119] This digital access-expanding endeavor decreases aesthetic dependence upon the work's limiting factors (that is, everything that contributes to its finitude) in order to be successful. One inadvertent result of this virtual immortality project will likely be that the existence of (or even engagement with) the physical work is perceived as considerably less important. Through technology, Google aims to "make the world's culture accessible to anyone, anywhere" and to assist "cultural institutions" in their role of "collect[ing] and safeguard[ing] our history and heritage" by "preserving these artifacts for a worldwide audience today and tomorrow".[120] This goal can only be achieved by removing those aspects of materiality, which would prevent this.

As the Google project recognizes, the geographic accessibility of works is often a limiting factor for aesthetic engagement. Yet greater access through the circumvention of geographical finitude always comes at the cost of some other aspect of the work. Henry M. Sayre explains that, as a result of its move from the gallery to open spaces, early land art had to contend with "the problem of presentation—how to have the work seen when it is not physically present".[121] Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* is one such permanent work, whose size and remote location in New Mexico means that many will not easily have the opportunity to see it in person.[122] Constructed from "[f]our hundred stainless-steel poles with solid, pointed tips" which

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[118] Museo Nacional Centro de Arte: Reina Sofia, "Guernica," accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/Guernica; All Posters, "Guernica (Picasso)," accessed March 2, 2016, http://www.allposters.co.uk/-st/Guernica-Picasso-Posters_c84559_.htm.

[119] Google, "Art Project," *Google Cultural Institute*, accessed March 2, 2016, https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project.

[120] Google, *Google Cultural Institute*, accessed March 2, 2016, https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/about/.

[121] Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance*: *The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 211-12.

[122] Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity - Walter De Maria, Diller + Scofidio, James Turrell, Andy Goldsworthy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), doi:10.7208/chicago/9780226451084.001.0001, 16-17, 36-37.

form a "rectangular grid […] 1 mile x 1 kilometer", the work is animated by "lightning strikes", albeit unpredictably.[123] Doug Adams records Melinda Wortz's response to the experience of standing in the work's midst: "De Maria's grid acts to make us aware of our place in the universe, infinitesimal but integral."[124] Jeffrey L. Kosky describes how the work prescribes its intended viewing experience:

> it brings us to stand on the earth under the sky: it makes us earthlings and leads us to the ground, but a ground that does not exist without the extraterrestrial, the sky overhead. […] Likewise, it disappears if you try to see it from inside the on-site log cabin, where, however much on the earth, you do not have the sky over your head. As the instructions included in a folder at the site remind you, "The cabin and porch are nice, but the experience is on the *Field*."[125]

As with other similar works of land art, most people, as Sayre acknowledges, "know them through their documentation, their reproduction in art books and magazines. This is the extent of our knowledge".[126] However, he proposes this is not necessarily "a 'lesser' knowledge" than that of first-hand experience.[127] Instead, he argues that De Maria's representation of *The Lightning Field* by "three colour photographs" for an exhibition at the Pompidou Centre allows the viewer's imagination to bring the work to life.[128] He suggests that the "transformation" of the static "documentary photograph" is possible because the images "*suggest* far more than they depict. They *project* a hypothetical experience."[129] In order to reach this conclusion, Sayre must either consider the mind's powers sufficient to create the equivalent of an embodied aesthetic experience or judge the now-inaccessible elements of the work to be of no real significance; their loss is either inconsequential or able to be overcome through the imagination.

Finitude comes wrapped in particularities. The finitude present in the ephemeral works of Goldsworthy or Christo and Jeanne-Claude, as for the works of other artists, is attached to those aspects of each work that creates its singularity: geographic, temporal, or material. Only by diminishing the significance of their roles

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[123] Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (London: Harvill, 1999), 570-71.

[124] Adams, *Transcendence*, 134.

[125] Kosky, *Arts of Wonder*, 36.

[126] Sayre, *Object of Performance*, 216. In this statement, Sayre specifically references Robert Smithson's earthworks; however, he acknowledges its application to other works as well. Ibid., 213.

[127] Ibid., 216.

[128] Ibid., 215.

[129] Ibid.

can these limitations be transcended. This requires judgments to be made about which elements of a work, and which of a viewer's aesthetic experience, should be considered essential. This is the pattern followed by much contemporary conservation as it attempts to address the challenge of preserving non-static works of art, including those that incorporate temporal change.

When finitude is circumvented in this way, the question "What is lost in this process?" should naturally follow. What is the consequence of devaluing those finite particularities that make something unique? Certainly, human life, both as the manifestation of a unique individual person and as the serially lived experience of moments, is itself marked by particularity. In his explication of poetry's power to "Call to Attention" through its use of particularity, Andrews Rumsey notes that, on the whole, particularity seems to hold a special fascination for humans:[130] "The power of particularity in creation both fascinates and confounds us. We are drawn to the special moments of things — […]. Indeed it is their very transience and triviality that imbues them with greater worth, […]."[131] His insightful inclusion of R. S. Thomas' poem, "The Bright Field" illustrates the potential within the temporary or finite, when it is recognized, to open a door to the eternal:

> I have seen the sun break through
> to illuminate a small field
> for a while, and gone my way
> and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
> of great price, the one field that had
> the treasure in it. I realise now
> that I must give all I have
> to possess it. Life is not hurrying
> on to a receding future, nor hankering after
> an imagined past. It is the turning
> aside like Moses to the miracle
> of the lit bush, to a brightness
> that seemed as transitory as your youth
> Once, but is the eternity that awaits you.[132]

The gospel writers make allusions to divine attention to the particulars of individuals (human and non-human) as a source of assurance in the face of tribulation. Both the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew include similar remarks: "Are not five

[130] Rumsey, Andrew. "Through Poetry: Particularity and the Call to Attention." In Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts*, 47, 51.
[131] Ibid., 61.
[132] Thomas in ibid., 55.

sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows."[133] Similarly, Moltmann sets out the contrasting orientations and emphases of reincarnation and the "biblical (i.e., Jewish and Christian) views of life and death" in terms of their valuation of individual particularities:[134]

> Every doctrine of reincarnation sets the individual life in the wider community of generations and of all the living.
>
> For the Abrahamic religions, on the other hand, the uniqueness of the human person and the "once-and-for-all" character of the individual life goes hand in hand with the counterpart of a personal God. […] Before God, every human person is an original, not a replica. The consequence is the high regard for the individuality of every life, and an awareness and appreciation of the uniqueness of the lived moment.[135]

Moltmann applies this "high regard" to his eschatological envisioning, suggesting that since the whole of a person's life is important it will be redeemed in its entirety.[136] He states:

> To be raised to eternal life means that nothing has ever been lost for God – not the pains of this life, and not its moments of happiness. Men and women will find again with God not only the final moment, but their whole history – but as the reconciled, the rectified, healed and completed history of their whole lives.[137]

V. c. Accept Finitude

The final option, which some advocate (or simply incorporate into their artistic practice), focuses on acceptance of aesthetic finitude. Thus, Schwartz thought current efforts which presumed art's immortality were better-spent "creat[ing] a new *ars moriendi*" in which acceptance of aesthetic mortality was the focus of attention.[138] Through this, he argued, both aesthetic and human finitude could be addressed, although he didn't develop the concept of the latter any further than the initial

[133] Luke 12:6-7 (NIV); Matt. 10:29-30
[134] Moltmann, *In the End*, 113.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Trevor Hart, "Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 266. "What Moltmann envisages is the simultaneous existence of human pasts, presents, and futures in a redeemed state." Ibid., 272
[137] Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 70-71. See also Moltmann, *In the End*, 106-07.
[138] Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi," 74.

suggestion of it.[139] Acceptance of aesthetic finitude can be a response to the inability to overcome limitations; but it can also follow from the recognition that efforts, which seek to translate a work into a more enduring format, will necessarily involve loss of some kind—losses that are regarded as *losses* and not merely as incidental and unimportant changes.[140] Positively, however, acceptance can also mean that one has found something of greater value within, rather than without, finitude. Certainly, Goldsworthy's ephemeral practice was predicated on the assumption that the only way in which he could know nature—which was his aim—was to participate in its transience. In addition, he expressed how it enabled him to learn to "accept and enjoy" the "transience of life" through "not trying to fight that by making always permanent things."[141] In a similar way, Christo and Jeanne-Claude celebrated the temporally imbedded nature of their works, whereby those processes that achieved the work's completion involved persons and circumstances that made it historically particular and unrepeatable. In this respect, aesthetic finitude reflected the temporality and limitations that were already present in life. These, like death, are familiar experiences of finitude. After examining the work of artists who chose to create ephemeral works against the grain of the cultural pursuit of permanence, O'Neill concluded:[142]

> One of the behavioral manifestations for artists who have experienced loss [in particular, the death of someone from AIDS during a time in which social rituals for grieving such losses were absent], especially disenfranchised loss is an engagement with transience. At a time in their life when the only constant is transience, they seek meaning not by trying to create something permanent, but by embracing the transient and embodying it in their work.[143]

Acceptance of human finitude can, thus, be reflected in the acceptance of aesthetic finitude. As Saito observes, the latter can result from a re-ordering of dominant cultural values: to be "'more concerned with process than with product'" in artistic practice "challenges the traditional Western ontology which privileges Being over Becoming", and as such has commonality "with Taoism and Buddhism."[144] Indeed, to

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[139] See ibid., 75.

[140] There are similar difficulties or losses that occur in translating a poem (where rhythm and terminology are especially precise) from one language to another.

[141] In Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 30-31.

[142] O'Neill, "Ephemeral Art," 96.

[143] Ibid., 94, 96.

[144] Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 31.

the latter religion, the Japanese aesthetic owes its approach to finitude.[145] Saito describes Yoshido Kenko's "aesthetics of difficult beauty" as rooted in the belief that no one can alter the universal impermanence that characterizes human life. Kenko, Saito suggests, argues for "a positive aesthetic experience" of those things that embody limitations because if things 'lingered on forever in the world, […] things would lose their power to move us'";[146] "'the most precious thing in life is its uncertainty.'"[147] She continues in her articulation of Kenko's position: "Furthermore, wishing for permanence, particularly in terms of possessions and life is inane because nothing and nobody can escape the universal fate."[148] According to Kenko, the failure to recognize this "'law of universal change.'" accounts for the presence of the inappropriate desire for "'everlasting life'".[149] Saito's observations are a reminder that, behind every desire to overcome, ameliorate, or accept finitude, there is a network of values and religious or non-religious lenses through which a person responds to the world.

VI. Immortality from without

As we have seen throughout this exploration of art's mortality, the underlying reasons for which the immortality of works is sought are invariably tied to the recognition that there is something of value in works of art and the persons or cultures behind them, which are themselves worthy of preservation. But it is more than that. In a unique way, works of art embody and allow the "taste" of the perdurance that many desire. Steiner describes it in this way:

> Only two experiences enable human beings to participate in the truth-fiction, in the pragmatic metaphor of eternity, of liberation from the eradicating dictates of biological-historical time, which is to say: death. The one way is that of authentic religious beliefs for those open to them. The other is that of the aesthetic. It is the production and reception of works of art, in the widest sense, which enable us to share in the experiencing of duration, of time unbounded. Without the arts, the human psyche would stand naked in the face of personal extinction. Wherein would lie the logic of madness and despair. It

[145] Ibid., 187.
[146] Ibid., 187-88.
[147] Saito and Kenko in ibid., 187-88.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Saito and Kenko in ibid.

> is (again together with transcendent religious faith, and often, in a certain relation to it) *poesis* which authorizes the unreason of hope.[150]

Yet finitude's persistence leaves limited options: either there is the bittersweet acceptance, which Kenko and others suggest best fits reality, or provisional and, thus, equally finite experiences of transcendence, or immortality must come from without––a possibility to which Steiner alludes as the purview of religion. As Saito astutely notes, while "the impermanence of everything" is universally recognized, cultural and religious appropriation of this fact is varied: in the West, the "human yearning for some thing or some sphere that is permanent and unchanging" finds one solution in "the Judeo-Christian notion of afterlife."[151]

The doctrine of the resurrection implies that immortality is not, the natural human end. Instead, the ineluctable human finitude, which culminates in death, requires divine outside intervention to overcome it. Moltmann aptly describes this contrast:

> The immortality of the soul is an opinion – the resurrection of the dead is a hope. The first is a trust in something immortal in the human being, the second is a trust in the God who calls into being the things that are not, and makes the dead live. […] In trust in the life-creating God we await the conquest of death – "death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15.54) – and an eternal life in which "death shall be no more" (Rev. 21.4).[152]

Aesthetic finitude, in all its forms (both positive and negative), is, therefore, a constant reminder of the human situation: one that is marked by temporality and limitations, including those that can be considered good and beneficial within the creaturely experience. Yet the negative manifestations of finitude, perhaps understandably, are often given greater conscious attention. Moltmann describes it in this way: "Again and again we come up against limits, and experience the failure of our plans for life, the fragmentary nature of our good beginnings and, not least, the guilt which makes life impossible for us."[153] Polkinghorne suggests that, without the hope of eternity, we will be swept up in the "tyranny of the present, the feeling of need to grab as much as we can before all opportunity passes away for ever."[154] One interpretive possibility, therefore, is that some aspects of aesthetic preservation,

[150] Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, 214-15.
[151] Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 149.
[152] Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 65.
[153] Moltmann, *In the End,* xi.
[154] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 48-49.

including the recognition of value in humans and their contributions, foreshadow a divinely wrought fulfilment of the desire for the perdurance of that which is good, which they represent. Indeed, Moltmann finds this thread of hope woven into the fabric of creation: "And from the psalms we also perceive that everything that God has created points beyond itself to the Creator and to the future of his glory, for which it has been created. Everything that is and lives, holds within itself this 'magic' of promise and points beyond itself, as the beginning of something greater."[155] Thus, much can be gained by keeping the mortality and immortality of art in tension. Keeping one foot firmly planted in the acceptance of aesthetic (and, thus, human) finitude, both enjoying and acknowledging its benefits and losses, will avoid hubris within both religious and non-religious frameworks. While the capacity to temporarily circumvent finitude need not be abandoned entirely in the former, allowing the other foot to rest in the expectation of true immortality from without, allows the freedom to cease that striving whose end is futility and replace it with living the life one already has. Polkinghorne provides an apt description of this perspective: "We are enabled to live our lives not in the spirit of *carpe diem*, but *sub specie aeternitatis* (in light of eternity). Hope enables the acceptance of existence and its possibilities and impossibilities as they actually are."[156]

[155] Moltmann, *In the End,* 3.
[156] Polkinghorne, *God of Hope*, 49.

Conclusion

I. Final Conclusions

In chapter one we saw that whether or not a personal afterlife was anticipated the desire for human immortality of some kind persisted; although its form altered, permanence or continuity was generally perceived as that which made present life meaningful and affirmed individual human value. We also noted the influence of scientific developments on expectations regarding human potential to control and overcome finitude as well as the difficulty in determining the boundaries of human existence.

In chapter two we explored the complex physical, cultural, and aesthetic factors that determine an artwork's perdurance. We demonstrated how they revealed the persistent vulnerability of a work's continuing existence and suggested, along with Storr, that aesthetic immortality could only ever be provisional. We observed how expectations regarding the lifespan of a work were similar to those for humans and were the result of technological developments. Moreover, we saw that in those instances in which the artwork's individual immortality was impossible alternative forms of continuity, such as documentation, were employed. Permanence as a marker of a thing's value emerged as a persistent theme. We observed how the artwork's continuing existence served as surrogate immortality for persons and cultures, but that this form of continuity was also plagued by art's provisional nature. Finally, we suggested that the preservative capacity of art could intimate the possibility of immortality outside of itself.

In chapter three we examined two types of conscious aesthetic finitude through the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude and Andy Goldsworthy: intentionally and intrinsically ephemeral art, respectively. We noted how artists involved in the creation of consciously ephemeral works often did so in order to embody or embrace aspects of human existence that are rooted in transience, which suggested that there was something of value to be gained through the acceptance of finitude. We observed that while the documentation of ephemeral art gave absent works a degree of permanence, its success required a diminution in importance of certain particularities; thus, it could only provide a compromised form of existence.

In chapter four we explored the theological implications of three possible responses to finitude: overcome, ameliorate, or accept. We acknowledged that the desire to overcome finitude was rooted in a positive desire for the continuation of persons and their contributions, resulting from recognition of their value, but could easily descend into hubris or denial. We noted that attempts to ameliorate finitude often resulted in the devaluation of essential aspects of human existence, including embodiment and particularity. Acceptance, we observed, sought value within rather than without limitations and laid the groundwork for a theological framework that could meet the desire for permanence through divine gift rather than human achievement.

I began this thesis with the hypothesis that the manner in which art's finitude is addressed mirrors in many significant respects humanity's response to its own finitude. I suggested that the pursuit of art's perdurance is a reflection of humanity's desire for permanence and a mechanism by which it seeks to achieve it; it does so, however, through means which, by nature, can only ever be provisional. I argued that this response to aesthetic finitude reflects cultural, and thus not universal, presuppositions about the relationship between a thing's value and its permanence, which are manifestations of a Western valuation of transience. I demonstrated that the provisional nature of art's immortality renders these overlapping pursuits (human and aesthetic) problematic and argued that when aesthetic finitude is not accepted essential aspects of human existence are devalued or denied. I concluded that a theological framework of death and resurrection as divine gift provides one means by which both aesthetic and human finitudes could be embraced and the underlying desire for permanence met.

In conclusion, a renewed awareness of art's provisional immortality could provide a helpful corrective to overreaching expectations of continuity while at the same time affirming those aspects of human finitude that, as part and parcel of what it means to be human, might be regarded as good. In many ways this is not an entirely new thought, but a recurring motif, which bears repeating; as such, it offers a fresh opportunity to reassess the nature of being human and the desire for immortality within a contemporary context. In the twentieth and sixteenth centuries, respectively, Gold and Biringuccio both urged recognition of life's brevity through acceptance of aesthetic finitude. In the first instance, the finitude resulted from intentional ephemerality; in the second, material transience was perceived to be intrinsically

inevitable. While four centuries of developments in medicine and conservation lie between their respective perspectives, they similarly affirm the fact of human finitude and the analogical potential of art to remind us of that reality as well as the benefits of its recognition and acceptance.

II. Next Steps

Where do we go from here? At the outset I suggested that a gap existed between the fields of conservation and theology in their understandings of and responses to aesthetic finitude. While many (such as Schawrtz, O'Neill, and individual artists) recognize and comment on the relationship between aesthetic finitude and human finitude, there has not been a systematic analysis of the religious and non-religious presuppositions about the nature of human existence and continuity that undergird preservation practices in the West. I would suggest that the work of McGilchrist, Scheffler, and Muñoz Viñas could provide helpful frameworks by which to undertake further research in this area.

Muñoz Viñas's *Contemporary Theory of Conservation* makes a significant contribution to the twenty-first century's understanding of and approach to preservation of works of art. He concretely identifies those pernicious complexities—some of which I outlined in chapter two—that make present-day conservation ethics less straightforward than a universal application of prescribed treatments to counter specific aspects of aesthetic finitude.[1] Instead he argues that conservation must begin by asking, "why, and for whom, things are conserved", in order to navigate and properly respond to the specific conservation needs that accompany the varied "meanings" that make works valuable to "different groups of people."[2] One possible way forward is to borrow Muñoz Viñas's question and ask it a higher level: why is it necessary to preserve this work? What else does the preservation of this particular work preserve? For whom does it accomplish this? Which aspects of being human are negated or supported by its preservation?

[1] See chapters three and seven in Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*.
[2] Ibid., 201, 14.

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