

Respect: Engendering Participatory Relationships in Conservation Education

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Respect: Engendering Participatory Relationships in Conservation Education

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In 2004, the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (The University of Melbourne) established a new subject, Respect, as part of a new Masters by Coursework in Cultural Materials Conservation. In this subject, guest lecturers who have extraordinary or senior cultural expertise and knowledge introduce students to the political and societal aspects of cultural materials conservation. They lead students through the complexity of issues relating to context, disruption, authenticity, legal standing, development, reinvention, identity, and minority status. In Respect, students are asked to think about conservation as a practice that could benefit from incorporating intellectual positions and emotional skills that have been developed by other cultures, or marginalized communities within our own culture, to support the preservation of their cultural material or cultural identity. In order to do this, Respect seeks to indicate to students the political nature of cultural material conservation decision-making. The subject also asks students to consider who the partners in cultural materials conservation are, and whether conservators and those with the responsibility and interest in cultural preservation have the skills to enter into successful participatory partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders.

En 2004, le Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (Centre pour la conservation des biens culturels) de l'université de Melbourne a établi un nouveau cours intitulé Respect à l'intérieur de son nouveau programme de maîtrise en restauration. Le cours fait appel à des conférenciers invités ayant des connaissances ou des expertises culturelles exceptionnelles, afin d'introduire les étudiants aux aspects politiques et sociétaux de la conservation du patrimoine culturel matériel. Ils instruisent les étudiants sur la complexité des questions touchant le contexte, la rupture, l'authenticité, le statut juridique, le développement, le ressourcement, l'identité et le statut minoritaire. Dans ce cours, on demande aux étudiants de concevoir la conservation comme étant une pratique qui pourrait bénéficier de l'apport des perspectives intellectuelles et des habiletés émotionnelles provenant d'autres communautés culturelles, ou de communautés marginalisées au sein de notre propre société, afin de contribuer à la préservation de la culture matérielle ou de l'identité culturelle de ces communautés. Pour ce faire, le cours Respect vise à sensibiliser les étudiants à la nature politique du processus décisionnel de la conservation du patrimoine culturel matériel. Les thèmes abordés amènent aussi les étudiants à réfléchir sur ceux qui sont (ou devraient être) les intervenants-clé en conservation du patrimoine culturel matériel, et si les restaurateurs ainsi que ceux ayant la responsabilité et un intérêt dans la préservation de la culture ont les compétences requises pour créer des partenariats fonctionnels.

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Introduction

In 2004, the University of Melbourne's Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC) commenced a new post-graduate program in conservation. This development occurred as a result of the closure of the national conservation-training program at the University of Canberra. Discussions took place in institutions across the country, universities considered the possibilities of a new course, press releases and public forums sought to secure the Canberra program, and conservators took stock of what had been achieved and what was possible for the future. In considering the type of skills that conservators needed in the twenty-first century, issues of cross-cultural competencies, and the ability of conservators to respond to client needs, were raised.

CCMC offers a mix of academic programs, comprising teaching and research programs, and conservation programs that include treatment and management programs. The Centre delivers services and training in paintings, paper, objects, frames, textiles, and architectural conservation. The Centre's commercial program provides income to underpin and cross-subsidize work on the university's collections, teaching programs and research.

The conservation treatment program has a broad range of private clients, indicative of the ability of conservation to reach beyond institutions into the lives of individuals, and the work of the treatment program strongly informed the development of the teaching program.

The decision to deliver this new program at the Masters' level was informed by two main considerations. The first related to international standards, and a perceived need to operate at parity with courses offered overseas, particularly with the introduction of the Bologna Model.¹ The second was the strong belief held by staff at CCMC that the care of cultural material is a highly specialized and highly responsible undertaking, which requires an informed cross-disciplinary approach. With these considerations in mind, staff at CCMC identified some of the core competencies required in conservation. The question of which disciplines should inform conservation (chemistry, art history, physics, anthropology for example) was central to the development of all curricula in the new program. Questions about sustainability and how conservation can ensure its professional and economic viability were also raised. There was another question that also clearly needed to be addressed if students were being trained to undertake any kind of public role.

This was the question of relevance. Who was conservation relevant to, and did the individuals and communities that conservators worked with align with the broader aims of conservation—to preserve cultural material, and by extension, to support cultural identity? An examination of the demographic of CCMC's students and clients indicated that there was a gap between the rhetoric of conservation ethics that sought to preserve cultural material without reference to economic or cultural positions, and the people who were engaged in conservation activities. This presented the opportunity to prepare curricula that could develop skills in cross-cultural communication, and that could prompt research questions that could contribute to broader and more diverse engagement. The result of these considerations was the establishment of a new subject entitled *Respect*.

Respect—The Subject

The course guideline for *Respect* describes the subject thus:

108-445 Respect

Respect aims to develop students' understanding of how the epistemology of cultural maintenance manifests in societal and cultural practices, and thereby gain an appreciation of the importance of material culture in people's lives. It seeks to challenge students to rethink the definition of culture as both a working and an academic construct.

Individual guest lecturers who have extraordinary or senior cultural expertise and knowledge lead students through issues of context, disruption, orality, authenticity, legal standing, reinvention, identity and minority status.²

Respect is divided into a series of topics, each seeking to address a practical aspect of conservation decision-making. Senior knowledge holders work with students to illuminate the topic and its associated issues. Topics include conservation and identity, presentation and translation, community history and identity, history and orality, dislocation, reinvention, maintenance, marginalization, intangible culture, living culture, cross cultural development, and describing cultural identity. **Table I** provides an outline of the pedagogical themes that are considered key to this subject, as they occur in the curriculum.

Reflecting on the History of Conservation

In *Respect*, students prepare a class paper in which, focusing on a key thinker, they consider the way in which other disciplines and other cultures have influenced cultural materials conservation. This is important given that conservation is located within and across the intellectual spaces occupied by science and the humanities, and has been developed within the very specific professional interests of cultural and information-based institutions, such as museums and archives. It is no coincidence that the conservation profession grew out of the same intellectual environment that museums helped to shape. As Tony Bennett and others have shown, humanities subjects such as anthropology and art history were developed within collecting institutions, and science subjects such as zoology, anatomy and botany built

classificatory systems that relied on collections.³ This history is reflected in conservation training programs that incorporate contemporary scientific enquiry (chemistry, physics, and the applied sciences) and strong humanities based-discourse (such as art history, anthropology or archaeology). Developments in the sciences and humanities therefore have an explicit association with the history of collecting institutions. Curatorial practice, which was developed within these institutions and which only later moved into university-training programs, contributed to both the development of classificatory systems and the location of material within these systems. As many of the world's great museums, libraries and archives were part of the infrastructure associated with colonialism, their systems of classification and analysis involved categorizations that reflected this colonial paradigm. For example, theories linking race and culture were an important thematic link across the sciences and the humanities, with evidence for these theories collected by, and located in, museums and associated collecting institutions.⁴

During the twentieth century, conservation practice grew out of the needs of these institutions to care for their national patrimony. In the second half of the twentieth century, educational institutions took over the training of conservators, and by the third quarter of the twentieth century, conservation training programs had been established across North America, Europe and in Australia. Institutions remained the major employers or end-users of conservation skills, and for this reason, conservation training tended to focus on delivering a skilled workforce for the museum, gallery, archive and library sector. By 2004, however, when the University of Melbourne began to teach cultural materials conservation, cultural theory and museology had progressed substantially from the 1970s when most conservation programs were established. Any consideration of the term 'cultural', even in the context of 'cultural materials conservation', now had the opportunity to take account of a much extended discourse that included work by George Stocking on collecting and collections,⁵ Nicholas Thomas on ethnography and anthropology,⁶ Stephen Weil on museums,⁷ James Clifford on cross-cultural engagement,⁸ Walter Mignolo on centres of knowledge,⁹ Kwame Appiah on cultural identity,¹⁰ and Arjun Appadurai on culture and globalization.¹¹ Decision-making within the conservation profession was being informed by the work of Miriam Clavir,¹² and by volumes such as *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*.¹³

The discourse that developed around these, and other writers, made it clear that the Western history of ideas did not reflect a universal world-view, and that Western institutions, and the knowledge they promulgated, involved political positions relating as much to the economics of colonization and technological development as to issues of knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer. Conservators, working with the object, often need to negotiate this political position even if it only appears as historical background relating to where the object was collected, or how it was stored or used. As professionals entrusted with the preservation of the records of knowledge (whether this is a painting, a document, a volume, an artifact or a scientific specimen) conservators are a critical part of this

Table I: An Overview of the Topics and Structure of *Respect*, Based on the 2008 Program.

Week	Lecture Topic	Lecturer/Contributor	Class Paper Topic	Authors Relevant to the Class Paper
1	Conservation and identity	Bruno Pouliot and students		
2	Presentation and translation	Visit to Bunjilaka and Koori Heritage Trust	Indigenous knowledge	Joe Neparrja Gumbula, Terri Janke, Martin Nakata
3	Community identity	Susan Reynolds	Science	A. F. Chalmers, Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn
4	History and orality	Wayne Atkinson	Orality	Walter Ong, Samir Naqqash
5	Dislocation	Pamela Curr and Marcia Langton	Dislocation	Pamela Curr (campaign e-mails sent 2006-2008), Marcia Langton
6	Reinvention	Ursula Flicker	Identity	Edward Said, Kwame Appiah
9	Marginalized histories	Warren Jenkins and Doug Western	Studying people	Clifford Geertz, James Clifford
7	Contemporary intangible culture	Mary Kenneally	The value of culture	David Throsby, Vijayendra Rao, Ilde Rizzo
8	Maintenance	Helen Brack	Culture and rights	Galarrwuy Yunupingu, M. H. Durie, James Youngblood Henderson
12	Living culture: the cultural continuum	Tharron Bloomfield	Material culture	Arjun Appaduri, Mary Douglas
10	Describing cultural identity	Majid Shokor	Cultural values	Edward Said, Walter Mignolo, Armatya Sen
11	Describing cultural identity	Arnold Zable	Education and disciplines	B. K. Hofer, Marie Battiste
12	Describing your professional identity	In this session students look at examples of professional curriculum vitae and discuss their sense of their own professional value and the contribution they can make to the preservation of cultural material.		

history of how culture has been collected and represented. Often, however, the answer to the question of how conservators, who are working in large bureaucratic organizations, can be part of decision-making processes that can inform museological practice remains unclear. This means that conservators may be part of a politicized environment in which they have almost no input into broader institutional strategies. The attempt by CCMC to assess and address the political aspects of conservation theory and practice, and therefore assist students to move effectively within politicized environments, forms the basis of this paper.¹⁴

Cultural activity, including collection building, is supported by a network of regional organizations, private individuals, public agencies, corporate entities, community networks, societies, family members, and other often disparate groups that have ownership of, and meaningful attachment to, cultural material. Increasingly, museum professionals are building stronger links with these groups, as part of strategies to engage the collecting institutions with a broader audience. The 2007 CCI

Symposium *Preserving Aboriginal Heritage* is an excellent example of some of the most recent work being done in this area.¹⁵ Such programs help ensure that the profession operates from a more strongly integrated community base, ensuring advocacy that reaches beyond institutional interests. It seemed important to reflect these more innovative interactions in the curriculum.

A final consideration in the establishment of the course was an assessment of the demography of conservation practitioners. Developing communication skills in students, in order to better include diverse cultural identities in conservation decision-making, was a particular concern of the new program.

The considerations identified above led to the development of *Respect*, in order to build skills and intellectual tools to support broader engagement between conservators and a diverse range of individuals and communities. As an academic course, *Respect* aims to balance an emphasis on dominant narratives

presented within the Western history of ideas. As a practical training subject, *Respect* shows students how dispossessed, marginalized and non-mainstream communities retain their identity by utilizing a raft of tools such as oral tradition, community networks, volunteerism, emotionally energized responses, performance, and other mechanisms to effectively preserve the cultural traditions of a cultural community.

Understanding How Conservation Connects with Culture

Nicholas Thomas has shown that culture within museums is a constructed and relational product and, therefore, that the meaning of cultural material in museums is different to the meaning it has for its originating community.¹⁶ Similarly, each discipline and profession has its own constructed 'culture' and operates 'with its own theories, methods, standards and literature' providing a set of shared beliefs and practices that define the discipline.¹⁷

In contemporary museology there is a strong focus on research and education.¹⁸ Within research and education programs, social and scientific discourses that were developed in the nineteenth century are maintained, including those that relate to public education (a strong and influential part of museum development in the nineteenth century) and to scientific classification and analysis. The political discourse that also accompanied museum development, however, with its roots in the Age of Empires and associated conjoining of race, culture and commodity, has disappeared from museum guidebooks and labels and is now seen as archaic and irrelevant. Nevertheless, collection building and cultural destruction are often historically aligned, as Annie Coombes, writing on the history of the collections of the British Museum, notes:

The date of any sizeable ethnographic presence in the British Museum is conspicuous. It corresponds to the concerted expansion of the British Empire and by the 1890s, to what has since become known as 'the scramble for Africa'.¹⁹

While many collecting institutions refer to this political discourse as historic, for many communities this historical past remains potent and potentially defining. Andrew Zimmerman, in his incisive study of the development of German museums, describes how German colonial forces killed 65,000 Herero who were seeking to return to their land between 1904 and 1907. He goes on to describe how this tragedy became an opportunity for the Berlin Museum of Ethnography to increase its collection of Herero human remains and material culture, by collecting this material from the death camps.²⁰ Obviously a display of Herero material culture will have a very particular resonance for a member of the Herero community. Examples of how loss of culture at a local level translates into museum acquisitions are common in the history of many major collecting institutions.

The themes of conferences such as 'The Object in Context', 'Crossing Cultures' and 'Diversity in Heritage Conservation' indicate how curators, librarians, archivists and conservators

have sought to engage with the issues raised above.²¹ Attempts have been made to address the political nature of museums through documents and statements that assert collecting institutions are public spaces where social capital could be built and stored.²² Space has been claimed for divergent views, for alternative voices, and for representation; all are important strategies for collecting institutions that increasingly saw funding linked to access and visitation rates. Nevertheless the demographic of museums professionals remains relatively similar, and relatively mono-cultural.

Conservators have sought to build effective public profiles by developing clear ethical standards that conjoin social and scientific positions, and indicate a respect for cultural integrity. For example, the *Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material's Code of Ethics* requires members to maintain '... an informed respect for cultural property, its unique character and significance and the people or person who created it' and undertake action that is '... governed by an unswerving respect for the physical, historic, aesthetic and cultural integrity of the object.'²³ This link between 'the people or person who created it' and '... the physical, historic, aesthetic and cultural integrity of the object' provides the basis for decisions about conservation and restoration.²⁴

Still, it remains the fact that most of the items conservators work on are from the collections of large institutions or wealthy individuals. Objects owned by many marginalized groups simply do not cross the threshold. While conservators work on a wide range of material, often from a range of cultures, the lack of investment by marginalized groups in conservation limits the knowledge that conservators have to draw from and relate to. More problematically, it limits the opportunities for interactions between 'the people or person who created [the object]'²⁴ and the conservation professional.

Limiting our professional universe in this way is similar to Wallerstein's criticism of the social sciences as described by Manuela Boatcă:

In his criticism of Establishment social science as a product of Eurocentric liberalist thought, Wallerstein had emphasized the geopolitical distribution of cultures of scholarship, by noting that from 1850 to 1914, and probably 1945, most of the scholarship had originated in, and was about, five countries: France, Great Britain, the Germanies, the Italies, and the United States. 'This is partly pragmatic, partly social pressure, and partly ideological: these are the important countries, this is what matters, this is what we should study in order to learn how the world operates' (Wallerstein 1996, p. 3).²⁵

For conservators, new challenges are being thrown up, that while able to be accommodated within our existing codes of ethics, nevertheless force us to consider what it is that may not be addressed in our practice. Indigenous communities are now emerging from an extensive period of dislocation, relocation, and social and cultural trauma, a period that correlates with the

history of museums. The generation of Indigenous people that now engage with conservation professionals are more articulate, better educated and have stronger legal understanding and support than their forebears. They are driving new debates about collecting institutions and their role. This presents important opportunities for conservators to shift their disciplinary allegiances to take into account knowledge systems that have not, to date, been part of our disciplinary toolkit. Further, a critical discourse that is informed by living cultures may provide intellectual tools for conservators to deal with some of the inconsistencies and inadequacies of their position within institutions. As James Bennett wrote, objects in museums can hardly be called 'living objects':

Objects, we are taught to believe, are central to museum culture, so to study the lives—or, as Sam Alberti puts it, to write the biographies—of objects in museums must be a powerful tool for understanding the sets of assumptions, ambitions, and beliefs the museum embodies and how these change over time. Such biographical trajectories are almost always one-way, from outside the museum to inside. Secured by institutionalized protection, objects can change their status in radical ways—they can move between gallery and store, between departments, and even between museums through the transfer of collections and the reorganization of institutions—but until recently they have rarely escaped with their lives. Destruction, decay, and loss have been much more likely ends to an object's sojourn in the museum than a further spell in the extramural world. Only relatively recently have improvements in the clerical and material management of objects raised a chronic problem of sustainability, and pressure on budgets has obliged museums to introduce procedures and programs for "deaccessioning."²⁶

Engaging with the Practice, Rather than the Institution, of Cultural Preservation

Conservation can be either consequential, being included at the end of a process of decision-making rather being part of this process, or it can be defining, being not only part of the decision-making process but driving and shaping this process. The question of how conservators can deliver programs to a diverse range of people and communities is an important one.²⁷ Teaching and learning programs in other disciplines, in universities where culture is a core part of the curriculum, will not usually provide answers. Courses such as art history, or cultural studies, are either confined within a very specific discourse or focused on philosophical or theoretical debates, discussions and articulations. The answer to the question 'How do we want students to engage with the 'cultural' in cultural materials conservation?' is not straightforward. The construction of a pedagogy that can deal with the relational aspects of culture is challenging.

The question 'What are the terms of engagement that are appropriate for conservators working in the twenty-first century?' is fundamental, but not easily addressed. The question of whom

conservators work for, and what conservators work on, focuses consideration about the human aspects of cultural materials conservation, and confirms and illuminates the political nature of conservators' interaction with objects. The course *Respect* therefore sought to address the need for students to develop skills appropriate to cultural engagement by employing people with authority and experience, that is senior or specialized knowledge holders who could address areas of authority, knowledge, expertise as well as equity, diversity and representation.²⁸ These speakers engage students in discussions of cultural trauma, cultural dislocation, and cultural continuity and the relationship of these issues to the preservation of material culture. As **Table I** indicates, the range of topics is spread over both face to face engagement and a set of readings that will help students develop an awareness of the kinds of tools that cultural leaders and cultural communities have built in order to preserve their culture. This in turn should provide students with more effective intellectual and practical tools and skills.

Another consideration that influenced the development of *Respect* was the 2,000 or so small museums and Aboriginal keeping places and knowledge centres that exist in Australia, which are run by volunteers and are generally unfunded or funded only by local grants. These groups rarely get money for more than a conservation survey or management plan, or for the treatment of one or two iconic objects. Clearly there is a resourcing hierarchy, with conservation available as a resource for major institutions, while many communities have no access to conservators. Conservators are part of a social-economic landscape where conservation is a stakeholder but not an enabled participant, nor an enabler. If conservators are to engage more broadly with cultural material, rather than simply with museum material, then it is useful for conservation training to provide an understanding of the socio-political, philosophical and economic factors that impact on the selection of cultural material for conservation. Intellectual tools that enable the proactive engagement of conservators across a range of sectors will support this.

Respect: the Course Content and the People Who Contribute

Respect aims to bring student conservators into the orbit of those with the responsibility for cultural preservation who are not part of the institutional world of conservation, and who can draw on a knowledge base that differs from, or is apart from, that of large collecting institutions. The course places emphasis on developing student skills that are essential in the process of engaging with a client. These include the ability to listen, to give due regard to cultural difference, to respect different ways of behaving, and to understand how to respond to different value systems. Diminishing the role of the written word, and emphasising the importance of oral communication, helps students understand the situation of a conservator when someone brings in an object that has high cultural or emotional value, but for which there are no records. In such instances, conservators are often completely reliant on the conversation they have with the client or community representative.

The first class (see **Table I**) includes an introductory exercise that asks students to talk for three minutes about the culture they belong to and describe its characteristics. They consider what questions they asked themselves before speaking publicly and what part of their identity they decided not to share and why. This exercise assists students to think about how cultural knowledge is exchanged and the difficulties involved in talking about culture. In 2008, the class was privileged to have Bruno Pouliot, Objects Conservator and Winterthur Assistant Professor in Art Conservation, present a lecture entitled “Lessons Learned: Awakening, Nurturing and Promoting Respect in Ethnographic Conservation”, and lead discussion.²⁹

In order to understand how Indigenous Australians are represented, students visit Bunjilaka at Melbourne Museum and the Koorie Heritage Trust, a not-for-profit organization developed by and for local Aboriginal people that ‘aims to protect, preserve and promote the living culture of Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia.’³⁰ Students consider the public spaces of each organization and describe their responses, including emotional responses to the space. They consider whether they feel they are in an area of specialist knowledge, of collection building, of entertainment and/or relaxation. Each year students have indicated that the political nature of their experience at these organizations was something that they had not considered previously as part of their museum visitor experience.

Australia has over 2,000 small, regional museums.³¹ Susan Reynolds, who is President of the Yackandandah Historical Society, examines the role of the local historical society in preserving local memory and local identity. Her talk is an education in the disparity between the government-endowed collecting institutions that they are familiar with in Australia’s capital cities (where most students come from and where most of them undertake internships and placements) and the virtually unfunded small museums and historical societies across the country. In December 2006, the Society’s museum was destroyed by fire four days before Christmas. The fight to rebuild the museum provides another aspect to the story of the challenges facing small communities.³²

Wayne Atkinson is an elder of the Yorta Yorta people. In 1998, the Yorta Yorta lost a court case, and in 2002 a High Court appeal, in which they were seeking Native Title to their customary land.³³ In this class, Dr. Atkinson talks about Indigenous links to land and the role of oral history in cultural transmission. He discusses the role of grass-roots activism in the continuing battle for Indigenous rights in Australia, describing how cultural maintenance supports the environmental movement as the Murray River and Yorta Yorta land dries up from drought and the diversion of water for irrigation.³⁴

Pamela Curr, Campaign Coordinator with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, takes students into the world of the dispossessed refugee.³⁵ For more than twenty years, Australian Governments have supported internment camps for refugees seeking asylum without official papers. Many are stateless and

without proof of identity or place of origin. Their life is hidden from other Australians through a complex system of physical and legal segregation, and their lack of material possessions means that their identity and therefore their history will remain hidden unless there is intervention to preserve the little that exists. Fear of being denied refugee status stops many from telling the story of their internment. Students are asked to consider such hidden histories and the role conservators can play in the transmission of important social facts.

The strategies that dispossessed and traumatized people use to retain their history are examined by Ursula Flicker who is a founding member of the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre (Melbourne, Australia) and who established the Centre’s Archives. At the Centre, Ursula discusses the delicate processes of receiving and holding important documents and associated memories relating to the Holocaust.³⁶ She introduces students to stories of survival and discusses questions relating to memory and evidence.

One of the questions students consider is how conservation privileges certain histories. For people who are institutionalized, there is often no possibility of retaining cultural material that is important to them, or that records their personal history. Warren Jenkins, Executive Director of ARAFEMI, an association with a mission to promote and improve the well-being of people affected by mental illness, and Doug Western, an active environmentalist and naturalist, present a challenging topic on the issues of identity that face those suffering from a mental illness. Doug describes his experience and steps toward recovery through his local environmental work. He also talks about the dispossession of the mentally ill and the role material culture plays in mental health. Each year, when Warren asks for a show of hands from those who know someone close to them who suffers from a mental illness, at least a third of the class raise their hands.³⁷

Mary Kenneally, comedienne, writer, and social and environmental activist, addresses ephemeral culture by examining the history of comedy in Australia. Mary asks students to consider whether it is possible to preserve aspects of culture that include timing and nuanced language as evident in humour and slapstick comedy.³⁸

Helen Brack is an artist as well as a teacher, presenter on arts issues and senior and much respected member of the Australian art community. She has the task of maintaining and preserving the oeuvre of her husband John Brack (1920-1999), one of Australia’s most important contemporary artists. Helen elicits responses from the students to questions such as ‘What constitutes art?’ ‘Should all art be preserved?’ and ‘How do we decide what is worth saving?’ She challenges students to consider how curatorial and conservation practice might be less than satisfactory in preserving the intent and meaning of an artist’s work.

When providing comment on *Respect*, Prof. Piri Sciascia, Maori Pro-Vice Chancellor at Victoria University, made the

point that for the preservation of Maori material culture three specialists are needed: the Maori elder, the Maori specialist and the conservator. As a paper conservator and a Maori representative of the conservation profession, Tharron Bloomfield represents two of these categories. Tharron talks to students about what it means to be both a conservator and a member of the Maori community and provides a personal account of how his professional identity and his personal identity respond to challenges of cultural appropriation, relocation and preservation.³⁹

Majid Shokor left Iraq as a refugee from Saddam Hussein's regime in 1995 and has established himself as a writer and actor in Australia. He has a long-standing interest in Iraq Jewish cultural identity, particularly the work of Samir Naqqash, and Iraqi-Jewish musicians in Israel, themselves refugees from Iraq. Majid explains how he uses film-making to explore stories of cultural allegiance and memory, and leads students through an investigation of how the politics of identity affects the preservation of culture.⁴⁰

Eminent Australian author Arnold Zable explores issues of cross-cultural identity and the intergenerational carriage of culture.⁴¹ As a writer, his interest in language is presented through a discussion of the way in which language, meter, and the emphasis of tone play an important part in the transmission of content as well as meaning. Coming to terms with this issue of preserving cultural meaning through stories presented across generations is of great importance for conservators who are committed to cross-cultural engagement via the nuances in oral delivery.

The course also takes advantage of the availability of two important colleagues. Sir Gustav Nossal, one of Australia's most eminent public figures and a major figure in medical research talks about developing a strong institutional culture. He served as Chairman of the committee overseeing the World Health Organization's Vaccines and Biologicals Program (1993-2002) and Chairman of the Strategic Advisory Council of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Children's Vaccine Program (1998-2003) and was named Australian of the Year in 2000.⁴² He encourages students to think about building institutions and research programs that have effective and global outcomes.

Yolŋu elder Dr Joe Neparrŋa Gumbula also takes part in the course when in Melbourne, introducing students to Yolŋu knowledge systems and the mechanisms governing public, peri-restricted and restricted knowledge. In doing so, he engages students in an understanding of the socio-cultural, religious, legal, and political dimensions of Yolŋu intellectual traditions.⁴³

Finally, Professor Marcia Langton leads discussions with students about various aspects of the course throughout the semester and provides mentorship for those students who wish to engage more with issues relating to Indigenous culture.⁴⁴

In the final class for the year, the discussion focuses again on professional identity with an emphasis on developing a

curriculum vitae, building a professional profile, and effective job-seeking that focuses students' considerations of who they are and who they want to be within this profession known as cultural materials conservation.

Respect: Course Assessment and Outcomes

The assessment tasks in *Respect* aim to provide the students with practical experiences that will be useful for their future careers. Students present a class paper on a public intellectual selected from a list of topics and associated critical thinkers (see **Table I**; columns 3 and 4 list the topics and the critical thinkers to whom the students are asked to refer in order to examine these topics). Students are not given a recommended reading list but are required to source relevant material on these thinkers and introduce their work to the class. This exercise broadens the literature with which students may be familiar to include commentaries on cultural economics, education, legal rights and a range of other areas that students may not have been introduced to in their undergraduate study. The class paper is then loaded onto the university's on-line Learning Management System as a future reference source for all students in *Respect*.

Students are also required to complete a 4,000 word assessment task. This can be an essay, the development of a research proposal in line with the Australian Research Council grants scheme, the preparation of a community based project grant or the delivery of a project that addresses some of the issues raised in *Respect*. This in turn determines the success of *Respect* as a subject, which is indicated by the ability of the students to produce assessable work that is relevant to the individuals and communities that form the focus of the course. Three examples suffice to illustrate this.

In 2007, following Pamela Curr's presentation on issues in asylum-seeker internment camps, two students proposed an essay as a joint project. They examined the issues of internment camp video surveillance, and considered relevant strategies for the preservation of this footage. Although important footage of abuse in the camps existed, and some tapes had been smuggled to the press, it was not clear whether surveillance tapes should have been lodged in the National Archives of Australia, and the responsibilities of preservation of the footage was made unclear by the commercial-in-confidence arrangements with the company contracted by the Federal Government to manage the camps. This research essay examined the legislative requirements for this video footage to be preserved under the Australian Archives Act, and found that, despite the existence of a commercial-in-confidence contract, the footage was still required to be lodged in the National Archives. The research focused on the way that legislation could be used to preserve material that would otherwise be removed from public access and memory.

The second example comprises proposals that students have put together for applications to funding bodies over the past three years. One successful application saw students partner with curators at the Cunningham Dax Collection of Psychiatric Art in a grant that provided funds to pay students to produce condition

reports for over 2,500 works on paper.⁴⁵ Other applications have included a proposal for a volunteer conservation program in the community museum in rural Yackandandah, a proposal to treat important documents at the Jewish Holocaust Museum, and at the Shrine of Remembrance.

In 2008 students submitted a successful application to fund a national seminar to examine the Australian government's response to a Senate Inquiry into the Indigenous Arts and Crafts Sector.⁴⁶ This brought together government representatives, senior Indigenous representatives and other influential people from across Australia to discuss policy and practical outcomes of the enquiry. Students managed all aspects of this seminar and have been assessed by diaries they kept of the planning and work involved with this project.⁴⁷

Conclusion

There is no doubt that conservation can be seen as consequential, where the opinion and expertise of conservators is sought as part of broader programs such as exhibition preparation or the preservation of an archive, and where the opinion of conservators is secondary to the overall management of a broader process. On the other hand, very few professions and disciplines have the ability to engage so closely with cultural material and with the people for whom this material is important. For this reason, conservation educators have an important responsibility to ensure that the next generation of conservators are provided with skills that enable them to best respond to the needs of a diverse client base. Further, conservators have a responsibility, as part of a group of professionals who can assist custodians preserve their cultural identity for future generations, to ensure that conservation expertise is as accessible as possible and to broaden access where it is shown to be limited or difficult. For dispossessed, impoverished or alienated people, preserving cultural material becomes a difficult activity and the loss of identity becomes a cycle supported or impacted by the loss or removal of cultural material. Proactive involvement in this cycle is important if cultural material is to be protected. For conservators who want to engage with the issues that affect a broader demographic of individuals and communities, associated involvement in politics, community empowerment and the development of funding strategies are critical. Teaching the skills for effective engagement is an important part of training and mentoring the next generation of conservators. Such a project requires the assistance of senior knowledge holders across a broad range of cultures.

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other new courses required for the Masters by Coursework program, has been tireless and has contributed to thinking that has enabled this course, and by extension, this paper. The input from students each year has been central to understanding what is required in delivering such complex topics to an emerging generation of conservators. Finally, a heartfelt vote of thanks to the editors and readers who provided comment on this paper, their feedback was invaluable.

Notes and References

1. The Bologna Model was introduced in Europe in an attempt to standardize the European university training system by providing a two-tier system comprising undergraduate and post-graduate training. For further information see: 'Europaem - Background: the Bologna Process', <<http://www.europaem.org/content/view/674/121/>>. Accessed May 2009.
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10. Appiah, Kwame, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 4-10.
11. Appaduri, Arjun, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 188-198.
12. Clavir, Miriam, *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 295 p.
13. Price, Nicholas Stanley, M. Kirby Talley Jr. and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro, eds., *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 500 p.
14. Two courses available to students particularly deal with issues of cross-cultural engagement and cultural material: *Respect*, discussed in this article; and *Garma Fieldwork*, convened by the Foundation Professor of Indigenous Studies, Professor Marcia Langton. An overview of these two courses is available in: Langton, M. and R. Sloggett, "Teaching Respect: Engendering Cultural Literacy in an Academic Environment," in: *Preprints, 15th Triennial Conference ICOM-Committee for Conservation*, Delhi, India, September 22-26, 2008, vol. 1, edited by Janet Bridgland (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008), pp. 101-107.
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16. Thomas, Nicholas, *op. cit.* (Ref. 6).
17. Scott, Marcelle, "Conservation interdisciplinarity and pedagogical implications," in: *Preprints, 15th Triennial Conference ICOM-Committee for Conservation*, Delhi, India, Sept. 22-26, 2008, vol. 1, edited by Janet Bridgland (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008), p. 123.
18. For example ICOM's Definition of a Museum claims: Article 3 - Definition of Terms Section 1. Museum. A museum is 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. <<http://icom.museum/statutes.html#2>>. Accessed May 2009.
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20. Zimmerman, Andrew, *op. cit.* (Ref. 4), pp. 244-256.
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22. Cameron, Fiona, "Transcending Fear – Engaging Emotions and Opinions – A Case for Museums in the 21st Century," in: *Open Museum Journal*, vol. 6, New Museum Developments and the Culture Wars, September 2003, <http://archive.amol.org.au/omj/volume6/volume6_index.asp>. Accessed May 2009. See also Vergo, Peter, ed., *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 230 p.
23. Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (Inc.), *Code of Ethics and Code of Practice*, <<http://www.aiccm.org.au/docs/AICCMBusinessDocs/CodePracticeEthics.pdf>>. Accessed May 2009.
24. The focus on ethics indicates an interest in locating practice within a broader context. A code of ethics is, after all, a way of explicating clear, agreed, objective ways of behaving. In 2000, the AICCM Code of Ethics was modified to include a *Code of Practice* in which reference was made to specifically articulate cultural and environmental positions as follows:
5. **Cultural issues.** The AICCM member should be

- informed and respectful of the cultural and spiritual significance of cultural material and should, where possible, consult with all relevant stakeholders before making treatment or other decisions relating to such cultural material. The AICCM member should recognise the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as first peoples, and as key stakeholders in the conservation of their cultural heritage material. When undertaking conservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultural property, the AICCM member should recognise that the objects and the information relevant to them are of equal importance, and that conservation practice must adapt to cultural requirements, particularly in respect of secret/sacred items.
6. **Natural Environment:** The AICCM Member shall recognise the potential for conservation activities to cause environmental damage. Accordingly, without endangering the welfare of cultural property, she/he should endeavour to undertake conservation treatments, or use materials, which have the lowest potential to pollute; unnecessarily waste resources; or otherwise damage the natural environment.
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 26. Bennett, Jim, "Museums and the History of Science—Practitioner’s Postscript," in: *Isis*, vol. 96, 2005, p. 604, <<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/498596>>. Accessed May 2009.
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 39. Tharron Bloomfield recently outlined some of his thoughts in relation to working with communities in his plenary session address to the ICOM-CC 15th Triennial Conference in a paper entitled: "Pupura te mahara—Preserving the memory: Working with Māori communities on preservation projects in Aotearoa New Zealand," in: *Preprints, 15th Triennial Conference ICOM-Committee for Conservation*, Delhi, India, September 22-26, 2008, vol. 1, edited by Janet Bridgland (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2008), pp. 146-152.
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