

# 1 “Once upon a time”

## Performative ultra-conceptualism and storytelling as conservation— Florence Jung

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You might have heard about Florence Jung. Her identity as a performance artist is notably elusive, to the point where some may argue that she is barely recognizable as an artist at all. It is difficult to spot her, but stories spread about her work in a disproportional relation to the accounts of her physical presence. Not entirely averse to her art being called ‘performance art’—though she abstains from using this term herself—Jung actively avoids personal presence and instead seeks to cultivate ‘situations’ (the term that she uses frequently in her work) that embody qualities of uncertainty and instability. Jung states:

I don’t feel addressed by performance art. I want to simplify things. I want to know what happens when you consciously exclude the object—the visible part and also the documentation—and maybe even the presence of the artist. I am influenced much more by minimalism than by most performance artists, with the exception of Andy Kaufman perhaps. I don’t see this as an aesthetic decision, but rather as a way to develop a corpus of works that are light, reduced, unstable, and uncertain. My true material is more about situations. I create staged situations for real life.<sup>1</sup>

Jung approaches her situations—in which “no facts, no evidence, no visual documentation exists”<sup>2</sup>—with the intention of fostering inclusivity, enabling everyone to engage in and become a part of the experiences she creates. Given that a significant portion of her works are intangible or necessitate keen attention to detail and contextual knowledge in order to recognize them, it becomes challenging to distinguish what elements are staged and what actually exists in reality or in the realm of everyday life. Moreover, her works’ experiential dimensions shift during each manifestation. Consequently, the dissemination of narratives and, at times, rumors, becomes the primary means by which her works exist and endure, occasionally causing the artist herself to question what truly constitutes her own creation and what is carried out by external forces, performers, and viewers. Jung posits: “My work has increasingly evolved into a form of storytelling. I also enjoy

hearing different narratives about my works; sometimes, I even have doubts myself about what the actual piece was.”<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, I take up Jung’s performative ultra-conceptualism and the prevalent choice of non-documenting to develop the idea of storytelling as a way of survival for these radically contextual works. From her first work, created for the graduate exhibition at Zurich University of the Arts (2013), to her subsequent invitation to major exhibitions such as *Manifesta 11*, in 2016, and awards such as the Swiss Performance Prize, in 2013, Jung’s work has attracted international attention. With her consequential refusal to self-document and depict—a remarkable achievement in times of the overwhelming visual saturation of public media—Jung virtuously plays the medium of experience. Resonating with a post-Fluxus register, and comparable to George Brecht’s granting of permission for the work to take place in the interpreter’s imagination, she precisely drafts her strategies of material and media refusal, both to dethrone the model of the artist as a sole creator and to dismantle the dominance of visuality. What to do about a work which takes place in a North Korean hotel room that consists of a thought not to be thought about (*Jung43*, 2015)? How to handle an exhibition in which each viewer, in order to experience the work, is requested to sign a legal document through which, in the course of a perceptual shift, they become a performer in it (*Jung59*, 2017)? How to handle a work that takes place via a changed circumstance and thus a shifting mental condition, such as through the knowledge acquired at the museum’s counter, where the visitor to an exhibition, once they consent to purchase a ticket, learns that it is co-curated by Jung (*Jung52*, 2017)? How to grapple with a social experiment in which exhibition visitors are hijacked and taken five hours away from the venue, to spend a night in a barn at a remote location, entertaining themselves (*Jung&Scheidegger*, 2014)? What to do about works of which the only evidence is conveyed through oral transmission, at times written down by a critic or a curator? How can we avoid despair when we think about these works’ afterlives and even their conservation?

This essay argues that Jung’s hyper-conceptual works, which inherently play with states of performative invisibility and intangibility as well as mental conditions and situational contexts, can be conveyed and transmitted by the very means that constitute them: storytelling, rumors, and tales. As in other modes of conservation, in which one of the physical mediums of the affected work is used to restore a deteriorated image or form (such as the use of paint retouching in painting conservation or wood chip putty in the conservation of wooden sculpture), the ‘restorative medium’ of this work is inherent in the work as one of its constitutive substrates. This is not to say that storytelling is Jung’s medium—an assumption she clearly objects to—nor that it occurs in her works as their only inherent element. It is to say that, indeed, storytelling offers a space in which we experience Jung’s art as works, and it is simultaneously a condition of possibility of their preservation. My first argument is aligned with Amelia Jones and Philip Auslander, who have claimed, each in their distinct ways, that photographic documentation is the space in which performance

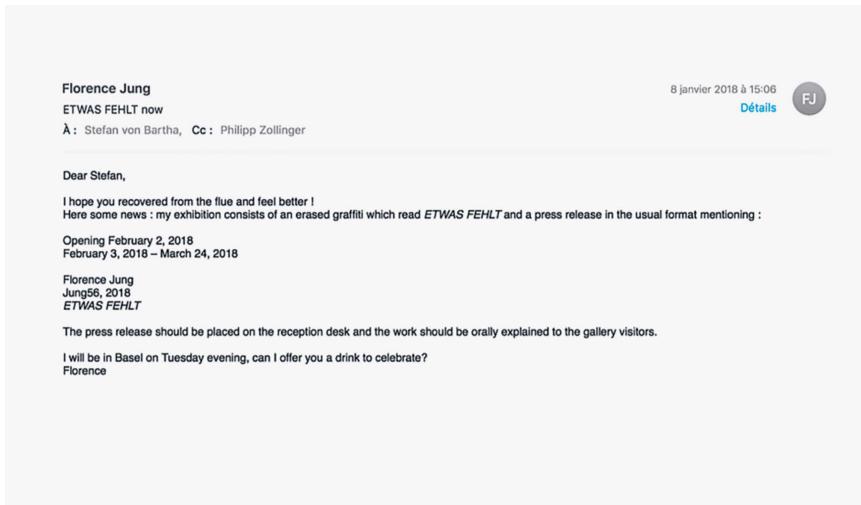
can be experienced<sup>4</sup>—an idea that I redirect to a different medium. I argue that Jung's conceptualism exposes us to a particular form of orality—and textuality—that constitutes her creative project. Indeed, both orality and textuality create a space for experiencing Jung's works. In line with my second argument, I suggest that they can be effectively conveyed through stories transmitted orally or via written accounts drawn from the subjective, elusive, and subversive memories of each individual remembering them. Rumors, just as tales, play an important part in this form of cultural transmission.

### *Something is Missing*

Rumors have spread about Jung's diversely named work *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* from 2017 (the official title, *Jung56*, follows Jung's numeric scheme). On the gray morning of January 6, 2018, upon their arrival at Basel's von Bartha gallery, located in the former shop of a gas station, the personnel discovered a large graffiti tag spread across the façade: "Etwas Fehlt" ("something is missing"). They were not amused by this discovery and immediately shared it with Stefan von Bartha, the owner of the gallery. The message reached von Bartha on his travels and upset him immensely.<sup>5</sup> Who could have dared to do this? Why did the Basel police fail to be more attentive in preventing such vandalism? Von Bartha shared the image on Instagram, along with his expression of discontent (Figure 1.1).<sup>6</sup> Two days passed before he had the tag erased.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1.1 "Etwas Fehlt" tag on the gallery window, a part of the work: Florence Jung, *Jung56*, 2018 (*Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt*). Image posted by Stefan von Bartha on his Instagram account on January 6, 2018. [www.instagram.com/p/BdnSTfFBsaq/](http://www.instagram.com/p/BdnSTfFBsaq/). Courtesy Florence Jung and von Bartha, Basel & Copenhagen.



*Figure 1.2* Florence Jung: “ETWAS FEHLT now.” Email to Stefan von Bartha and Philipp Zollinger, January 8, 2018. From *Von Bartha Report*, no. 12 (2018): 20. Courtesy Florence Jung and von Bartha, Basel & Copenhagen.

A few months before the infamous tag appeared on Basel’s established art venue, Jung had accepted an invitation to a solo show at von Bartha gallery. Her consent was conditional upon one factor: the gallerist would remain uninformed about the work until it occurred—or, more accurately, until it disappeared. Five years after the event, Jung tells me in a conversation that she assured the gallerist that he would recognize the artwork as soon as it was there.<sup>8</sup> She then hired a befriended graffiti maker to spray the phrase overnight.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the message neither arrived well, nor was it glimpsed behind its surface as the artist intended.<sup>10</sup> For the work’s full coming into the world, an act of annihilation, an erasure, needed to occur. Relief was brought by the artist’s email of January 8, 2018 (Figure 1.2), that suggested the artwork’s conclusion:

*Dear Stefan, . . . Here some news: my exhibition consists of an erased graffiti which read ETWAS FEHLT and a press release in the usual format . . .*

I had heard stories about this work. However, for the majority of my research time for this essay, I was unable to retrieve any visual evidence of the tag. The von Bartha gallery’s Instagram featured a black square in place of an image (Figure 1.3). Nonetheless, I have had a rather clear sense of what happened on the glass façade of a low building concealed behind the gas pumps of an Avia gas station in Basel. I have not been there physically, and yet I felt that I had experienced the piece as it unfolded its many layers in my consciousness, posing most arduous questions: Can a work exist in the world

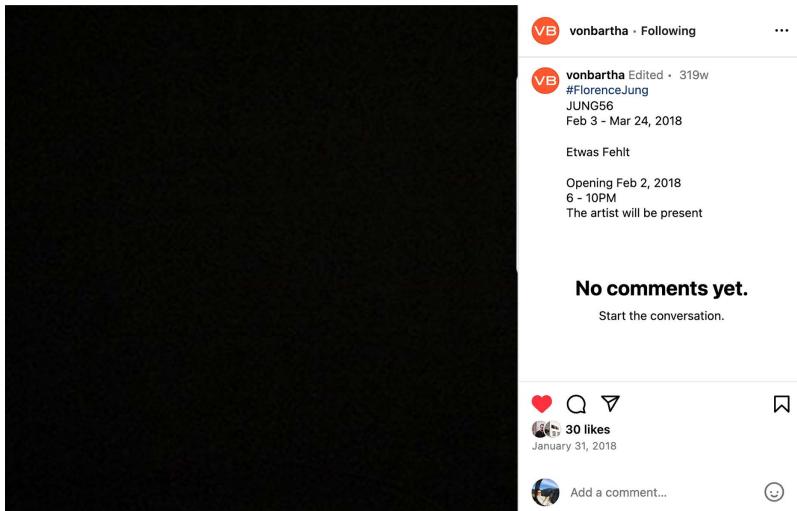


Figure 1.3 Instagram von Bartha gallery announcing “Etwas Fehlt” by Florence Jung. January 31, 2018, [www.instagram.com/p/Ben08N9hNWl/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/p/Ben08N9hNWl/?hl=en). Courtesy Florence Jung and von Bartha, Basel & Copenhagen.

solely as a change of circumstance, a psychological shift, or a mental picture? Can a work *be told in a story*?

My attempts to find a visual trace of the tag online remained without success—a status quo that increased my bafflement and curiosity. How, in our mediated age, did an act of vandalism like this fail to leave a tangible trace?

If there is something that is ‘typical Jung,’ then this situation might qualify as such. Amongst her most staggeringly conceptual works, not only does the artist consider this artwork complete only after its intermittent sign (the tag) is removed, but she also submits to the void surrounding her persona on popular media—a result of her non-image policy. If we were to analyze the work within a performative paradigm—the act of executing the work overnight as a performance and the tag as both a physical leftover and an object that stands in for the performance in its absence, as it were<sup>11</sup>—then the removal of the tag doubles the performance’s disappearance. The work’s subversive potential might thus be seen in its ability to create an uncomfortable void, uninviting of people and traces—one that can only be filled, and contained, by a narrative.

Again and again, it is the multilayered, intermittent disappearance—even that inflicted ex post facto on social media (remember the black square in Figure 1.3)—that creates the work and the thin line between reality and fiction that we, as receivers of Jung’s message, need to come to terms with. Has the work really been there, or have we imagined it, and how might this

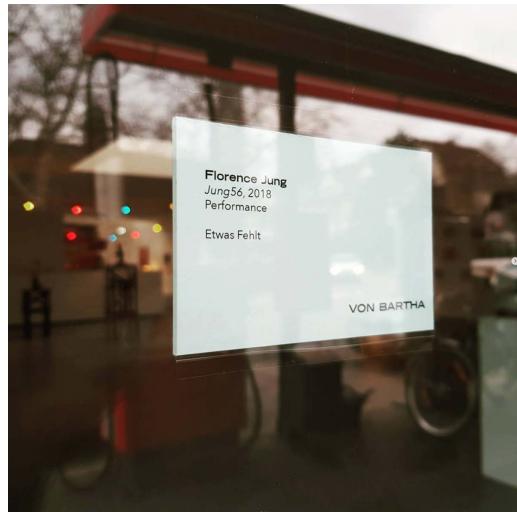


Figure 1.4 Gallery caption: Florence Jung, *Jung56*, 2018. Performance, *Etwas Fehlt*, von Bartha. [www.instagram.com/p/BesyO6vhEmt/?hl=en&img\\_index=1](http://www.instagram.com/p/BesyO6vhEmt/?hl=en&img_index=1). Courtesy Florence Jung and von Bartha, Basel & Copenhagen.

matter for our mental experience of it? What role does memory play, and what role does the audience play?

The artist considers the work's audience not as those experiencing the tag, but as those that witnessed its disappearance.<sup>12</sup> She states:

I am interested in everything which exceeds the two usual categories of reality and fiction . . . the things that were true one day and vanished the next, the things that do not exist but will in the future, the false memory of things which were never there, when something is forgotten and yet impalpably present.

In the gallery space, the viewer is asked to look for clues: a vague press release laid out on the counter, or a label. Gallery employees provide information about the artwork when asked, and there is a caption (Figure 1.4) and an interview (Figure 1.5). These scattered, fringe elements create a deliberate lack of an official version, allowing multiple potentially conflicting interpretations to emerge. The artwork functions "like open-source software,"<sup>13</sup> with each contribution potentially altering the piece's meaning, inscribing a new possibility on the previous one.

Since its inception and as of the time of my research for this essay (spring–fall 2023), *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* has been executed three times that could not be more different from one another, not least because they appeared in the languages specific to their sites. The first iteration took place

SY: Let's go back to reality, in concrete terms what is presented in the gallery space? How does the visitor learn about your work?

FJ: By looking for clues. I left a vague press release on the gallery counter and there is a regular label. Then there are the employees of the gallery who tell you about the piece in their own way, but only when they are asked about it. Obviously, there is also Stefan von Bartha's Instagram post. And eventually this discussion. All these elements are peripheral and scattered, but that's all that is available. I do take a lot of care in not creating an official version, or rather in letting many and possibly contradictory pseudo-official versions emerge. My pieces work somehow like an open source software. Each record or image adds to the others, at the risk of totally changing the situation and make the piece disappear again.

Figure 1.5 Excerpt from Sophie Yerly, “When You Realize It, It Is Too Late/Wenn du es realisierst, ist es zu spät: Florence Jung,” *Von Bartha Report*, no. 12 (2018): 20–21. Courtesy Florence Jung and von Bartha, Basel & Copenhagen.

at a gallery in Paris where, in the course of the same night that a graffiti maker applied the tag on a door under the cover of night, an attempted burglary occurred. The gallerist appeared to believe that the two were connected.<sup>14</sup> In fact, there was no way of finding out whether it was the performer who did a little more than the commission. On the small Aegean island of Anafi, on the occasion of the Phenomenon 3 biennial in 2019 (where Jung realized three scenarios), the large-scale tag was applied on a construction site, well visible from a school house in which the exhibition took place.<sup>15</sup> Rashly overpainted by the biennial's assistant due to an unintended connotation with the simultaneous passing of a person on the island, the tag's leftovers are still reported by present-day visitors as transpiring through the material strata up to the surface of the overpainted area. What comes to mind are the traces left behind after authorities erased from public spaces several artworks by Harald Naegeli (born 1939), the infamous graffiti artist of Zurich. Their persistence, whether as washed-out shapes or as mental images, cannot be undone to those who have seen them.

The deliberate, well-thought-out evocation of negative space through erasure, the work that inhabits a liminal territory between being noticed and being overlooked, and the potential for a conflation of the ephemeral and

the physical in the palimpsestic overlays of many different presents, all draw attention to Jung's works. However, they are simultaneously most challenging in terms of their compliance with social norms and behaviors, their reliance on chance, susceptibility to error, and their contumacy with standard forms of cultural transmission. Namely, how can a work that evades physical presence—often on multiple levels—be made to endure? Is it the concept in Jung's scenarios that makes the work? Jung posits:

My medium consists of not having one. In my works, most of the time, there are no objects, no spectacle, and sometimes even an audience is missing. I am interested in triggering invisibility, in the discreet, in the economy of means.<sup>16</sup>

Rumors and stories occur on the horizon as plausible holders of meaning. Jung insists:

In the situations I create, there are no facts, no evidence, and no visual documentation . . . there are rumors about such situations. However, I wouldn't consider these rumors as my medium; they are simply what remains in the end because my voice shouldn't be louder than that of other people.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of whether they are seen as ends in themselves or as a means to an end, it is, I argue, these rumors, and, by extension, the storytelling, that offer an ultimate sphere for her works' experience.

### **Radical openness, or who makes the work of art?**

Jung provides clear and detailed instructions to performers for all her works, guiding them in conducting the actions before they are officially performed/materialized. In this regard, her work during the planning and rehearsal stages is meticulously—or “thickly”—described and prepared.<sup>18</sup> From this phase on, however, Jung's work is exposed to an extreme form of openness. Jung says, “What people experience and what performers do are just as much a part of the piece as my concept for it. Anyone can claim a part of it for themselves.”<sup>19</sup> Not only does the artist prefer to be absent during the materialization of her concepts, whether public or private, but she accepts the contingencies and indeterminacies of the results. The decision not to be there at the moment when her works become materially manifested through social bodies, institutional systems, and spatial circumstances is a pragmatic one, as her presence might limit the endless potential of the work in its unfolding. Jung releases the work into the world by escaping the limitation of these determinative scenarios.

When Jung precisely instructs her friend to spray a tag on a gallery window or a door, she imagines what can happen in the work's realization. Controlling certain parts of the work, such as the instruction and selection of the performer-collaborators, Jung prescribes the work's general frame, leaving

open what happens on the other side of the intentional model, when the work leaves her ‘hand.’ Welcoming chance and misunderstanding and integrating them into the work, Jung references Duchamp’s eternal query: “Who makes the work, the artist or the beholder?” She answers it by adding to the mix the performers, critics, curators, and other participants.

Inviting others to participate in such an idiom calls for spectators who, in Jacques Rancière’s words, “are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it.”<sup>20</sup> Rancière adds: “An emancipated community is in fact a community of *storytellers and translators*.”<sup>21</sup> Inviting others makes art more socially responsive, as Suzi Gablik has proposed;<sup>22</sup> Jung seems to affirm a social relatedness devoid of monocentric mythology. Having left behind the modernist ideals of uniqueness and freedom, the new relationships that Jung creates foster a mindset distinct from isolated, solitary, and self-centered, self-contained, and self-referential individualism. Jung’s vision of the self, as proposed by her artwork, is ecological. The self is no longer solitary and self-sufficient. Instead, it is interconnected and interdependent.

Bringing in Félix Guattari’s concept of ‘transversality,’ which roughly signifies the overcoming of old, sedimented structures and routines in well-established practices, might be useful here.<sup>23</sup> Although Guattari uses it with reference to the transformation of institutions (such as psychiatric hospitals), the term has become a part of the ongoing genealogies of new materialisms.<sup>24</sup> Transversality, as the term implies, contrasts with both verticality (referring to hierarchies and leadership) and horizontality (relating to groups organizing within specific sections or compartments), much like the way one creates a line while writing by hand. In the art world, the maker-beholder connection, the relation between the performer and the score, and the claim that a work is realized upon the completion of a creative act, are results of such established hierarchical systems. Jung’s works, however, by leaving the authority of the execution with the performer or the viewer/participant (remember, for instance, the kidnapping piece *Jung&Scheidegger*, 2014), proclaim mental realization as a valid form of completion of an artwork (in contrast to the belief that, in visual art, a mental concept is followed by the physical realization of a work). By erasing a work’s material traces (thus opposing the commodity-driven art world), they not only prompt what Brian Massumi calls “a perception of perception,” a kind of “thinking-feeling,”<sup>25</sup> but also open up otherwise closed logics and hierarchies. No doubt, by deterritorializing roles, questioning competencies, and challenging art institutions, Jung’s works generate new potent assemblages and alliances.

### **The impossibility of absence**

So far, I have established that disappearance and the interstices between reality and fiction are at the center of Jung’s interests. But there is a fine nuance to the absent and the (in)visible that needs to be addressed to better understand Jung’s work’s sophisticated inner mechanisms.

As indicated, the erasure of the artwork is never truly final; instead, the work persists as a palimpsestic accumulation of traces. Consider the graffiti on the gallery window: *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* still lingers therein as an afterimage etched into the memory of those who witnessed it. In other words (and as with Naegeli), for those who saw it, the wall is forever marked by the tag (and then by its absence/presence). In the case of the Anafi biennial, the tag, as the story goes, has endured within the layer of paint applied to conceal it. This palimpsest of what should otherwise be missing holds potent symbolism. It does not unveil reality but rather inhabits the terrain between the given and the other world/realm—partially erased yet never entirely obliterated. Between now-and-here and there-and-then, the artwork lingers in people's recollections, not entirely present but not quite suppressed either. To preserve such a work would, paradoxically, be to safeguard the absence in all its nuance, not as a *fait accompli* but as an ongoing *process of absencing*, a spatiotemporal movement between here and there and now and then, as a condition necessary for the existence of this artwork—with a noted difference between being and disappearance and being and concealment. While emergence and disappearance might be grasped as the continually resumed act of life getting rid of itself, concealment is an intentional act of keeping things in secrecy that might involve deception, reticence, and non-acknowledgement.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, we owe one more glimpse into the distinct perceptual context of *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt*. When we say, “something is missing,” we may observe that absence is nonexistent since “something” is present within this phrase. In other words, as soon as “something” is uttered, it occupies mental and physical space. Language reaches its limits. Essentially, there is no such thing as absolute absence (“Je sais bien mais quand même”; “I know very well but just the same”), a fact that I will shortly address when inscribing a solid space to the work in the realm of cultural preservation.

### Levels of visibility

As we have observed, *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* exists on different levels of visibility, where absence is a dynamic rather than a static concept. These levels are reflected in the work's textuality. Just as in all of Jung's works, in *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* text occurs prior to the work's realization as a form of instruction protocol, which can be improved upon after its initial installation. This is outlined in the ‘Certificate,’ which provides all the necessary information when a work requires restaging or becomes part of a collection. As in other Jung works destined for acquisition, the *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* protocol involves an A3 paper document folded in the center, containing a cover sheet featuring the work's title on page one, a scenario describing the situation on page two, an activation protocol for the scenario on page three, and the terms and conditions on page four. But like the Coca-Cola recipe, the certificate is not meant for public eyes. Deliberately concealed, or visible only for those allowed into the arcane sphere of

the work’s inner functioning, my insistence on depicting it in this essay was politely, yet firmly, rejected.

But not all text in Jung’s works, otherwise so essential to the works’ discrete behind-the-scenes operations in museums or events, remains concealed. Her artworks’ textual spheres exhibit three levels of visibility: the title of the work is usually shared with the public; however, the scenario must remain confidential and should only be used for internal communication with curators. It should never be disclosed before the work is completed, as its related actions rely on the participants being unaware of being drawn into a plot (remember *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt*, in which the gallery owner was left in the dark). In the case of a one-off exhibition, Jung activates the work herself to avoid sharing the activation protocol. In the case of a work’s acquisition, the activation protocol, which is intended solely for internal use by the collectors who need to be able to activate the work in Jung’s absence, is shared together with the legal note.

Documents such as activation protocols play a crucial role when a performative or conceptual work enters an institution. These documents—usually contracts or agreements—assign artists a more prominent role when transitioning a performative work into a collection than has often been the case with object-oriented works.<sup>27</sup> This standard contract for her scenarios has become a part of Jung’s proactive strategy since 2017. Having been awarded CHF 20,000 on the occasion of the Swiss Art Awards (2017), Jung engaged a lawyer to assist her in developing a contractual document that she could use in the future for all her works entering collections. Jung believes that granting flexibility in shaping the scenarios and leaving details of the work to be fixed by the museum is crucial. What happens, as Rachel Mader puts it in her discussion of three of Jung’s works in the Aargauer Kunsthaus/Bundesamt für Kultur collection (BAK, Swiss Federal Office of Culture), is a redistribution and a reconceptualization of responsibilities between the museum and the artist.<sup>28</sup> So where, amidst all of this, can we position conservation?

### Potential images: Permission to document

Dominated by documents and images, the practice of contemporary conservation might at first appear unsuited to accommodating Jung’s works. At the level of primary resources, the artist’s aversion to (self-)documentation leaves her work mostly absent from the internet, art magazines, and other forms of popular documentation. As I have established, her works’ proclivity toward the missing suggests that what is absent might actually be more powerful than what is present. Jung posits:

This is a very pragmatic decision. It also has to do with the fact that my work can hardly be documented. It’s not about images here, but about constructing situations and the personal experience of the participating audience. There is no adequate image of what is visible, and even less so of what is not visible.<sup>29</sup>

What people experience and what performers do are just as much a part of the piece as my concept for it. Anyone can claim a part of it for themselves. For this reason, I don't document my pieces.<sup>30</sup>

But unlike Tino Sehgal's prohibition of documentation—so popularly metabolized in conservation literature—in which the artist questions the regulative system of institutions and displays, Jung's decision as to whether or not she sanctions documentation is contingent on the affordances of a singular work. Although the audience is free to take snapshots of her works, their history shows that, in the majority of cases, the visual documentation is missing, opening space for imagination and speculation, and, not least, storytelling. Jung also applies this rationale to the publication of photographs of her persona. She prefers to hide behind established personalities holding her name, or include them in the play of identities, to represent her in the media. The biographical, she claims, detours the message.<sup>31</sup>

Yet there is a light on the horizon for conservation: unlike Sehgal, who forbids the recording of his works and insists that the acquisition process be done entirely orally, Jung clearly opens her works to be documented by others.<sup>32</sup> To leave the decision to others is to allow a production of *potential* rather than determined, closed images. A smart choice: rather than dominating the work and its world with her own view, these snapshots, made in the era of smartphones, represent the gaze of the beholder, or the spectator, of her work. Again, authority is replaced with relationality and interdependency, enabling the work rather than constraining it through norms and regulations. Before too long, these potential images will create a transversal archive of visual documentation—not her own.

Yet there is another form of archive that accumulates in a fleeting, transitory, and transversal way, and it is being told.

### Storytelling as cultural preservation

We need stories to understand ourselves. We are the only creature that does this unusual thing, of telling each other stories in order to try to understand the kind of creature that we are. When a child is born, the first thing [it] requires is safety and love. The next thing that the child asks for is, "Tell me a story."<sup>33</sup>

Salman Rushdie steps into a long tradition of human storytelling. Long before the advent of writing, storytelling played a pivotal role in disseminating cultural traditions and values. In the Western philosophical tradition, Plato held that storytelling was vital to preparing Guardians to perform their duties in the ideal state. For Walter R. Fisher, known for introducing the narrative paradigm to communication theory, human beings are natural storytellers. Moreover, a good story is more valuable than a good argument. Individuals naturally engage with their environment through narratives: "In the beginning

was the word or, more accurately, the *logos*. And in the beginning, ‘*logos*’ meant story, reason, rationale, conception, discourse, thought.”<sup>34</sup> According to Fisher, it was only with the pre-Socratic philosophers that *logos* and *mythos* were dissociated.<sup>35</sup>

As an age-old practice, storytelling not only harnesses the power of narratives and serves as a tool employed for the purposes of education, cultural conservation, entertainment, and the inculcation of moral principles, but also shapes our experience of the world. Stories serve as a fundamental mechanism for human memory, as we tend to retain information more effectively through narrative than mere bullet points or lists.<sup>36</sup> With the capacity to transmit cultural information from one generation to the next, storytelling is not only a key element in the creation and propagation of culture,<sup>37</sup> but it also serves as a recursive and dynamic process of cultural preservation. Each story told adds to a collective archive, enriching and influencing other narratives. (We may remind ourselves of Rancière’s notion of spectatorship as an emancipated community of storytellers and translators.)

When I refer to storytelling, I am specifically addressing it in a direct sense. However, objects, too, can convey stories of their material making, the technological advancements through which they came to the world, and of the form and content they represent. Performative objects tell stories of their interrelations with meanings and actions. On the level of visuality, photographs are often regarded as powerful storytellers, with the ability to convey stories that surpass mere words.

Because, in storytelling, the emphasis lies less on factual accuracy and more on cultural cohesion, not all stories are bound by truth; many perpetuate myths, fables, or legends that serve a distinct purpose within a given culture. Among numerous Native American tribes, oral storytelling has been instrumental in preserving history and imparting wisdom to younger generations. Similarly, the sub-Saharan and West African regions boast a rich tradition of storytelling.<sup>38</sup>

Considered a more equal, sustainable, and just method of preserving traditions and cultures, storytelling is a powerful tool that brings attention to individuals often excluded or marginalized in traditional historical accounts. By giving voice and agency to the storyteller, it challenges prevailing cultural narratives.<sup>39</sup> Regarding non-Western approaches to preserving cultural heritage, and according to her vision of an indigenized museum, Puawai Cairns advocates that the main function of museums should be to transmit stories—museums should become hubs for people to share their stories and to reflect on and interpret histories (see Chapter 7 in this volume). Artist Rosanna Raymond, of the collective Pacific Sisters, sources storytelling as both a contemporary performing art and a living tradition.<sup>40</sup> She maintains that through storytelling, we are never in the past, but rather we become our ancestors—we are enacting and conserving them (see Chapter 12).<sup>41</sup> The Black tradition prides itself on powerful stories and the oral passing of traditions, customs, and rites that survived with and through their tellers despite the enslavement

and dispossession of their lands, origins, and material culture.<sup>42</sup> As a form of continuation of this rich tradition, some of the members of the Black Art Conservators association (Chapter 8) turn away from writing as an expression of the dominant white culture toward modes of oral story conveyance in conservation.

### Storytelling: Space of experience

My first encounter with *Etwas Felht/Something is Missing* was through a story. During the subsequent research, various stories—including but not limited to those conveyed to me by the artist and the gallerist—accumulated into a mini-archive that I was able to activate at my leisure. Oftentimes, the stories diverged, representing opposing or even conflicting views. For instance, von Bartha recalls that the graffiti was erased very quickly from the window of his gallery, while Jung recalls that she waited days until she could announce the work's completion. As with the Rashomon effect so effectively used by television drama *The Affair* (2014–19), in which the same event is presented from varying viewpoints and perspectives, I was exposed to the worlds of *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* as they unfolded through the telling of subjective experiences.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of truthfulness and attachment to facts, I felt that, in these stories, I was offered a space for a genuine experience. Although in a state nearing obsession to find visual evidence of the tag, I needed neither a physical object, nor a proof of existence of the work to experience it in my imagination.

Philosopher John Dewey's perspective on experience is that it is an intrinsic aspect of the human species, deeply ingrained in our evolutionary development. Experience refers to the manner in which living organisms engage with their surroundings, and in the case of humans, this environment encompasses the social, cultural, and political aspects of our existence. To reframe our perceptions of what is fundamental and distinctive in the artistic process, Dewey directs our attention to the entire artistic process instead of focusing solely on the tangible outcomes embodied in what he calls the “expressive object.”<sup>44</sup>

For Dewey, and as the contemporary Deweyan Richard Shusterman explains, we need to privilege the aesthetic process over the product, such that art is defined as “a quality of experience” rather than a collection of objects.<sup>45</sup> The processes of commodification and fetishization in which conservation actively partakes<sup>46</sup> should not lure us into thinking that art is limited to the objecthood of a physical artifact alone. Rather, for Dewey, art lies in the experiential activity through which it is created and perceived. Far from a dismissal of objectification—denouncing the object altogether—Dewey insists that an object is, in fact, necessary to structure the aesthetic experience: just as creative ideas need to be embodied in an object, the aesthetic experience has to be “fused with the matter of the object.”<sup>47</sup>

Such an understanding of an artwork as a bundle of experiential activity allows the space created by the story into, and as, the realm of the work’s experience. In the post-Deweyan sense, in Jung’s case, the aesthetic process lifts the work further from the physical object-referent, as the work is constructed and transmitted by oral narratives and experienced in the imagination. One could even say that it is no less malleable or formable in comparison with the experience of a physical object.

The idea of storytelling offering a space for the work’s experience is far from a theoretical, passively received, or imparted assumption. Rather, it springs from the doing of this artwork—receiving and telling the story—by individuals deeply engaged in its working (on the ‘cutting table,’ at the gallery, and as an object of study).

### **Griot: An agent of preservation**

The storytelling considering *Something is Missing/Etwas Fehlt* reveals several individuals contributing to the archive of stories. There is, however, also my telling of a story about these stories—a reflexive second-degree story, a form of interpretation and translation (Rancière), that is self-reflective of its own formation.<sup>48</sup>

As such, I might step back and examine where I stand within the broader context of this study, as an individual whose power lies in reiterating the story and passing it on, whether actively via word of mouth or, ex post facto, passively through this essay’s printed form (ex post facto because no longer actively amending the story, as happens in live transmission). In the process of knowledge formation, have I evolved beyond being merely a researcher? (Or should such research, as an active form of knowledge formation, be conceptualized itself as a mode of storytelling?) Have I become a conveyor of the intangible archive, and, in a Derridean sense, an archon of this story?<sup>49</sup>

Here, the figure of the griot, associated with the craft of storytelling, comes in handy. The griot is considered a “scholar of its African nation”<sup>50</sup> and an individual serving as a troubadour and storyteller, as well as, historically, a counselor to kings.<sup>51</sup> Born into specialized family groups, griots played multiple roles in traditional West African societies, their role encompassing genealogy and historiography. Griots served as praise-singers, musicians, social intermediaries, counselors, and even dancers and acrobats. Closely tied to the nobility, griots attended to kings, warlords, and Islamic scholars. Beyond their social duties, griots held vital cultural responsibilities, preserving history, genealogies, sayings, songs, and music through oral traditions in a largely non-literate society. In return for their services, griots received sustenance, clothing, livestock, jewelry, and even land. However, the rise of Islam, colonialism, and modernization eroded their roles and rewards, rendering the “Master of the Word” less relevant in changing social and political landscapes.<sup>52</sup>

Returning to our context, could I—or any contemporary custodian of this work for that matter—assume the position of a present-day griot in transmitting the story to their social network and ensuring its movement across time? Could a story transmitted in this way offer a possibility of experience of an artistic work? I argue, and am convinced, that it could.

### **The performance of memory and recollection**

Storytelling and oral history revolve around the process of remembering and their attending notions of memory types (among others, individual, collective, public, official, and flashbulb memories) and how they contribute to human recollection.

Memory is a dynamic process of creating meaning. For the historian Lynn Abrams, memory, as the fragmentary remains of experiences that are transposed into autobiographic narratives that endure over time, involves recalling stories, images, experiences, and emotions.<sup>53</sup> Thus, remembering is an ongoing and imperfect endeavor. Importantly, memories are not confined to the past; they also pertain to the present. For Annette Kuhn, memory is an account shaped by discourse and language; “[memory] is neither pure experience nor pure event.”<sup>54</sup> While memories recovered through oral narratives and storytelling lack objective reliability and measurability, they hold a personal truth for the individual recollecting them—a sense I gained from my conversation with everyone that experienced Jung’s work.

Remembering is inextricably linked with forgetting, with losing memory. Jung seems to be clearly aware of this fact, as well as how it shapes her work. “Forgetting or disappearing is the DNA of the work—one cannot fight against it. It is about accepting it and allowing it to leave on.”<sup>55</sup> As with the paradigm of loss in object-based conservation, which has (too) often been assigned a negative value resulting from assumptions of the perpetual function of objects in cultural institutions and collections, here, forgetting is not an inherent vice, but rather an intrinsic (rather than extrinsic) change inscribed into the work.<sup>56</sup> Thus storytelling as a method for these works’ survival is less concerned with the accuracy of the conveyed meanings, which will obviously lack external validation, than with the subjectively shaped liveness and vitality of the story that is passed on. After all, the robustness of the work lies less in its material presence and more in its ability to be transmitted—it is an ongoing performance of memory and recollection.

### **Storytelling: A different kind of knowledge**

In his examination of knowledge in the postmodern era, in which he defines postmodernity as incredulity towards metanarratives, the post-structuralist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924–98) initially distinguishes between two types of knowledge: “narrative” and “scientific” (*The Postmodern Condition*, 1984).<sup>57</sup> Narrative knowledge characterizes “primitive” or

“traditional” societies and is rooted in storytelling often conveyed through rituals, music, and dance. For Lyotard, this type of knowledge lacks external validation; its legitimacy is inherent within the narrative itself and is sustained by the timeless continuity of the tradition. It is passed down from those who heard it in the past to those who will share it in the future. Questioning the authenticity of narrative knowledge is not a consideration. In fact, Lyotard proposes that there exists an inherent incongruity between the concept of legitimization and the authority of narrative knowledge.<sup>58</sup> This proves helpful in situating this form of knowledge in conservation.

As I have argued elsewhere, conservation is an epistemic practice and knowledge-generating activity, which itself sources various forms of knowledge.<sup>59</sup> Storytelling as a narrative knowledge that lacks external validation does not seem to pair up well with several other forms of knowledge dominant in conservation, such as those ascribed a level of objectivity, often generated as a result of scientific analysis and technical investigation. It is, therefore, not overly surprising that these conservation methods, which have been concerned with tangible, object-based artifacts, have frequently overlooked the intangible elements of heritage preservation. These include the transfer of memory, expertise, techniques, and knowledge, which are vital for sustaining various forms of non-object-based practices, including less object-centered forms of contemporary art. In fact, Western institutions in the realm of art and culture have historically downplayed or even suppressed practices like orality, direct physical transmission, and ritual inheritance, all of which play a fundamental role in ensuring the longevity of object-less and body-based forms of expression.<sup>60</sup>

One should not be blinded by this status quo, however: a shift is currently taking place in conservation scholarship towards the incorporation of alternative and non-Western forms of knowledge conveyance.<sup>61</sup> Also, under the veil of object-oriented methodologies and their seemingly ‘safe’ attachment to science, both conservation science and object-based conservation boast a wealth of narrative knowledge that has been expressed in what I term ‘conservation narratives.’ In conservation practice, in narrated documentation—in the objects’ descriptions and narrations of treatments—conservators tell stories about works and the people that make and mend them.<sup>62</sup> Fantasy and recollection play just as important roles in these stories as the desire to stay truthful to the artist or their work. As in Paul Ricoeur’s narrative theory, which mediates between phenomenological time and cosmic time to reconcile them through language,<sup>63</sup> the narrative mode of conservation enables conservators and cultural stakeholders to grasp the divergence between acts of salvage and the progress of entropy and decay. Conservation narratives tell stories that mediate between these otherwise irreconcilable poles by allowing us to better understand the sense of doing conservation.

The meaningful emplotment is manifest not only in conservation’s documentation, however. Oral narrative, the artwork’s biography, and the genre of artists’ interviews mediate—and thus make more graspable—various constituencies and temporalities of the works, their worlds, and associated actors.

More recently, and rightfully decentering one-man genealogies submitting to a narrow model of artistic genius, conservators have begun listening to stories told by artists' assistants, technicians, and a broader ecology of cultural workers invested in artworks over their lifespan. Often, this knowledge is related to techniques and methods—to “how the artists would do it”—and is challenging to articulate because it resides within the realm of the implicit and non-verbal. Finally, we tell stories about conservation itself, creating its identity as an ongoing epistemic body of expertise and experience.

### **Coda: A retrospective in Bordeaux**

My research for this essay found its conclusion in the last moments of my conversation with Jung, which focused on her retrospective that was about to open in Bordeaux.<sup>64</sup> In this large-scale project, and yet intimate and contained as with all Jung's projects, she invited twelve local small shop owners from different neighborhoods of Bordeaux, from a hairstylist to an Indian food seller, with no links to the visual arts whatsoever, to listen to the story of one of her works, and retell it to those who would ask. The series was initially conceived as a form of delegated labor: Jung wished to retrieve twelve human “carriers” of her works' stories so that they would relate them to the shop owners, only later to personally transmit them due to financial constraints. A compilation of twelve cards with the shop names and addresses featured on a poster served as the only material evidence of her retrospective taking place at Frac MÉCA.

When Jung speaks of the retrospective, I feel confirmed: not only is the idea of storytelling as cultural conservation viscerally present in Jung's artistic project, but the artist turns it into the very medium of her retrospective. In an extreme form of openness to change and chance Jung entrusts her work's stories to strangers with the intention for them to pass it on. In an interconnected, interdependent, and ecological manner, the work—which consists in an activation of twelve of her historical works—spans across individual and collective minds and is told by word of mouth.

Submitting to a story, we willingly open ourselves to the potential of deception. In doing so, we acknowledge the likelihood that not every narrative is grounded in truth and that some may indeed be products of pure fiction. What if the store owners embellish the work and present their version of the tale in a manner distinct from the account given by Jung? Would such a divergence lessen the artwork's appreciation? What if it is all a construct of imagination—an ongoing performance of the work in the people's minds, memories, and recollections, in the shops and the streets of Bordeaux, the entire tapestry? Regardless, I feel compelled to listen.

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## Notes

- 1 Florence Jung and Dominikus Müller, “Ich weiss nicht, ob das, was ich tue, Performance ist: Die Künstlerin Florence Jung im Gespräch mit Dominikus Müller,” Performance Process (website), December 1, 2017, accessed June 18, 2023, <http://performanceprocessbasel.ch/journal/new-entry>. Translation from German by the author.
- 2 Jung and Müller, “Ich weiss nicht.”
- 3 Jung and Müller.
- 4 Philip Auslander, “The Performativity of Performance Documentation,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (September 2006): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1162/pajj.2006.28.3.1>; Amelia Jones, “*‘Presence’ in Absentia*: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997): 11–18.
- 5 Stefan von Bartha, in conversation with the author, October 20, 2023.
- 6 The Instagram message reads: “New window design as a surprise this morning @ vonbartha/lucky we can fix it but no respect for these idiots destroying windows, spaces, walls and more. This is no art, just stupid. Even if I am a big fan of graffiti, this ain’t it! #hatersgonnahate #basel #destroy #window #gallery #culture#stupid #switzerland #kantonspolizeibasel @kantonspolizei\_baselstadt #dosomething #stophisshit.” [www.instagram.com/p/BdnSTffBsaq/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BdnSTffBsaq/).
- 7 Sophie Yerly, “When You Realize It, It Is Too Late/Wenn du es realisierst, ist es zu spät: Florence Jung,” *Von Bartha Report*, no. 12 (2018): 20–21.
- 8 Florence Jung in conversation with the author, August 23, 2023.
- 9 Florence Jung, *Etwas Fehlt*, von Bartha, Basel, February 3–March 24, 2018, [www.vonbartha.com/exhibitions/florence-jung/](http://www.vonbartha.com/exhibitions/florence-jung/), accessed August 25, 2023.
- 10 Von Bartha recalls suspecting various subversive artists and, in a fit of anger, remembering that the gallery had been tagged before, though never so blatantly and directly. However, when the police were called to the “crime scene” to file a protocol, they recommended that the staff clean the graffiti, which proved to be easily achievable. Von Bartha, in conversation.
- 11 I venture into this when exploring the idea of “the aesthetics of disappearance” in performative works in which the work’s transience generates the urge to preserve and collect, expanding the all-accumulating material archive. Hanna B. Hölling, *Revisions: Zen for Film* (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2015), 80–81.
- 12 Yerly, “When You Realize It,” 21.
- 13 Jung, in Yerly, 21.
- 14 Another consequence was that the gallerist wished to keep the graffiti preserved. Jung in conversation.
- 15 Phenomenon (website), accessed October 20, 2023, [www.phenomenon.fr/uploads/2/5/5/25555543/program\\_final.pdf](http://www.phenomenon.fr/uploads/2/5/5/25555543/program_final.pdf). My research has also revealed a presence of the work in another exhibition, whose tag features the name of the artists and the work’s title and year, followed by a text: “Somewhere nearby, there is a graffiti stating, ‘Something is Missing.’ It is awaiting to be erased.” “Florence Jung: Jung80 (2021), Jung69 (2019), Jung56 (2017), 2021, 2019, 2017,” Artsy (website), accessed October 6, 2023, [www.artsy.net/artwork/florence-jung-jung80-2021-jung69-2019-jung56-2017](http://www.artsy.net/artwork/florence-jung-jung80-2021-jung69-2019-jung56-2017).

## 46 Performance

- 16 Florence Jung and Heinz Schütz, “Florence Jung: Ist die Türe abgesperrt? Ein Gespräch von Heinz Schütz,” *Kunstforum International*, no. 264 (2019): 126. Translation from German by the author.
- 17 Jung and Müller, “Ich weiss nicht.” Translation from German by the author.
- 18 Philosopher David Davies employs the descriptors “thin” and “thick” to denote the extent to which a composer has specified performance details via work-determinative directives. These directives encompass the composer’s guidance in the score and supplementary instructions concerning instrumentation. David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 26–27.
- 19 Jung and Müller, “Ich weiss nicht.”
- 20 Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” *Artforum* 45, no. 7 (March 2007), accessed March 1, 2024, [www.artforum.com/features/the-emancipated-spectator-175248/](http://www.artforum.com/features/the-emancipated-spectator-175248/).
- 21 Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” emphasis my own.
- 22 Suzi Gablik, “Connective Aesthetics,” *American Art* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 2–7.
- 23 Félix Guattari, *Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955–1971*, trans. Ames Hodges, intro. Gilles Deleuze (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1972] 2015).
- 24 Helen Palmer and Stanimir Panayotov, “Transversality,” New Materialism (website), September 13, 2016, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/t/transversality.html>.
- 25 Brian Massumi, “The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens: A Semblance of a Conversation,” *Inflexions: A Journal for Research Creation* 1, no. 1 (May 2008), accessed March 2, 2024, [www.inflexions.org](http://www.inflexions.org). On theories of perception, see Janneke Wesseling, *The Perfect Spectator: The Experience of the Art Work and Reception Aesthetics* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017).
- 26 For Martin Heidegger, for instance, and especially characteristic of his later thought, being is in the process of self-concealing. On the idea of concealment as reticence and non-acknowledgement, see Thomas Nagel, “Concealment and Exposure,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 3–30.
- 27 Rachel Mader, “Aggregatzustände von Performances und die Statik des Museums,” in *Aargauer Kunsthaus: Mit Gegenwartskunst umgehen*, ed. Simona Ciuccio, Katrin Weilenmann, and Katharina Ammann (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess), 188–97. See also Emilie Magnin’s study of Rizzo’s acquisition by the Stedelijk, Chapter 6 in this volume.
- 28 Mader draws this conclusion in connection with Jung’s works *Jung53* (2017), *Jung69* (2019), and *Jung75* (2020). Mader, “Aggregatzustände.”
- 29 Jung and Schütz, “Florence Jung,” 128.
- 30 Jung and Müller, “Ich weiss nicht.” Translation from German by the author.
- 31 Jung and Schütz, “Florence Jung,” 128.
- 32 “I like it when people document my work as much as they want. Why not? I don’t document it myself, but that doesn’t mean others can’t do it differently. In fact, I love it when people do because instead of official images, you get possible images. And in a few years, hopefully, there will be a series of images of my work, although they won’t be my images. It will solely be the perspective of the audience. That’s one of the crucial freedoms of the smartphone age: you capture the image you want. I also don’t believe in preventing people from doing so. I want my perspective to be one among many, not the dominant one.” Jung uses the words *mögliche Bilder* rather than *potentielle Bilder*. Jung, “Ich weiss nicht,” 4. Translation by the author.
- 33 Salman Rushdie, “Storytelling and Writing: Masterclass,” 2020, YouTube, accessed March 1, 2024, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPDOioWeByo&ab\\_channel=MasterClass](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPDOioWeByo&ab_channel=MasterClass).

34 Walter R. Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 5.

35 Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration*.

36 In the realm of business, storytelling finds a practical application in enhancing persuasion techniques. It serves as a conduit for intertwining knowledge and emotions, captivating audiences through surprising twists, suspenseful elements, and the impetus to act.

37 Lucas Bietti, Otilie Tilston, and Andrian Bangerter, “Storytelling as Adaptive Collective Sensemaking,” *Topics in Cognitive Science* 11, no. 4 (2019): 710–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12358>.

38 So for instance, in present-day Ghana, an Akan folk tale of the mischievous spider Anansi, preserved for centuries as part of an exclusively oral tradition, serves as a prime example of a story that has been passed down through generations. Storytelling did not survive everywhere in its centuries-long spur. In Benin, traditional storytelling was suppressed by the colonial education system, economic demise, and urbanization. Raouf Mama, “To Make Our World a Gentler, More Compassionate World,” in *Traditional Storytelling Today: An International Sourcebook*, ed. Margaret Read MacDonald (New York: Routledge, 1999), 9–12.

39 Questioning whether storytelling should be classified as a fine or performing art, or as a folk art or craft, Hannah Blevins Harvey and Joseph Daniel Sobol examine storytelling as a contemporary performing art, exploring its presence in various community and fine art settings, including theaters, festivals, schools, libraries, and more. Hannah Blevins Harvey and Joseph Daniel Sobol, “Storytelling as Contemporary Performing Art: Introduction to the Special Issue,” *Storytelling, Self, Society*, special issue on “Storytelling as Contemporary Performing Art,” 4, no. 2 (May–August 2008): 61–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505340802000735>.

40 “Rosanna Raymond in Discussion,” interview with Hanna B. Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman, and Emilie Magnin, May 17, 2023, *Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge*, YouTube, accessed January 21, 2024, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNNKncD6xrU&ab\\_channel=SNSFPerformanceConservation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNNKncD6xrU&ab_channel=SNSFPerformanceConservation).

41 In the research project “Activating Fluxus,” Aga Wielocha, Josephine Ellis, and this author embrace storytelling as a powerful tool for revitalizing and activating 1960s and 1970s art and culture. In particular, Wielocha gathers stories about specific Fluxus artworks in a podcast, thereby engaging in a process that counters dominant art histories. “Radio Fluxus: Stories from the Fluxus Archives” (podcast), Activating Fluxus (website), accessed June 17, 2023, <https://activating-fluxus.com/radio-fluxus-2/>.

42 Black storytelling is powerfully utilized as an onto-epistemological tool to elevate Black imaginations, uplift Black dreams, and consider how Afrofuturity is qualitative futurity. Black Studies elevates the ethical obligation of researchers to prioritize the voices of their participants, viewing these as more than just a tool for comprehending our past and present realities. Instead, researchers ought to emphasize the significance of using these voices to enhance the positioning of inquiry in relation to both the future world and future research endeavors.

43 *The Affair*, an American series created by Sarah Treem and Hagai Levi, and starring Dominic West, Ruth Wilson, Maura Tierney, and Joshua Jackson, delves into the emotional consequences of extramarital relationships. The term ‘Rashomon’ derives from the eponymous Japanese film from 1950, in which it is used to describe the unreliability of eyewitnesses.

44 John Dewey, *The Latter Works, 1925–1953: Vol. 10—Art as Experience*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, [1934] 1987), 88, 91, 95.

45 Richard Shusterman, “Pragmatism: Dewey,” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2020), 97–106.

46 Hanna B. Hölling, “Conservation, Desire and Affect: Fluxus Fetish,” in *Activating Fluxus, Expanding Conservation*, ed. Hanna B. Hölling, Aga Wielocha, and Josephine Ellis (London and New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

47 Dewey, *The Latter Works, 1925–1953*, 280. See also Tom Leddy and Kalle Puolakka, “Dewey’s Aesthetics,” in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021), accessed October 26, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/dewey-aesthetics/>.

48 On the concept of translation applied to contemporary art, see Zoë Miller, “Practitioner (In)visibility in the Conservation of Contemporary Art,” *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 60, no. 2–3 (2021): 197–209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01971360.2021.1951550>.

49 The word ‘archive’ has roots in the Greek words *archeion*, meaning a government house, a house of archons or magistrates—and *archē*, or ‘magistracy,’ ‘rule,’ or ‘government.’ These roots were the point of departure for the French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s concept of the archive. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9–10.

50 S. R. Toliver, *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork* (London: Routledge, 2022). Bietti, Tilston, and Bangerter, “Storytelling as Adaptive Collective Sensemaking.”

51 Similarities (and differences) might be seen between the griot and other living repositories of cultures such as the Vikings’ skalds, the bards of Irish and Scottish culture, and the scops of Anglo-Saxon lore.

52 In the present-day Westernized culture of Senegal, the Wolof griots still practice their hereditary tradition, whether or not it is adapted to new circumstances. Cornelia Panzacchi, “The Livelihoods of Traditional Griots in Modern Senegal,” *Africa* 64, no. 2 (April 1994): 190–210, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1160979>.

53 Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009), 78–79.

54 Annette Kuhn cited in Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 79.

55 Jung, in conversation.

56 On the notions of intrinsic and extrinsic change, see Hanna B. Hölling, *Paik’s Virtual Archive: Time, Changeability, and Materiality in Media Art* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 98. On the criticism of loss as negative property, see Gala Porras-Kim, “Getty Artist-in-Residence Gala Porras-Kim on the Spiritual Lives of Objects in Museum Collections,” recording of a lecture at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, YouTube, accessed March 2, 2024, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-WBkHEWgbY&ab\\_channel=GettyResearchInstitute](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-WBkHEWgbY&ab_channel=GettyResearchInstitute).

57 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Ashley Woodward, “Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998),” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed September 24, 2023, <https://iep.utm.edu/lyotard/>.

58 Woodward, “Jean-François Lyotard.”

59 Hanna B. Hölling, “The Technique of Conservation: On Realms of Theory and Cultures of Practice,” *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no. 2 (2017): 87–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19455224.2017.1322114>.

60 As if confirming this trend, in his recent book *A Theory of Cultural Heritage: Beyond the Intangible* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), Salvador Muñoz-Viñas assigns oral storytelling—craftsmanship and cooking alike—a metaphysical quality, one that locates it in the realm of inherent mutability (p. 141).

61 See, for instance, Rebecca Gordon, “Indigenous Storywork as an Ethical Guide for Caring with Social Practice Artists,” in *Prioritizing People in Ethical Decision-Making and Caring for Cultural Heritage Collections*, ed. Nina Owczarek (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), 24–41.

- 62 I develop the concept of the ‘conservation narrative’ in Hölling, *Paik’s Virtual Archive*, 132–33.
- 63 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- 64 Florence Jung, *Retrospective*, Frac MÉCA, October 14, 2023–March 3, 2024, Festival International des Arts de Bordeaux Métropole (website), accessed September 27, 2023, [https://fab.festivalbordeaux.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FAB2023\\_DOUBLE.pdf](https://fab.festivalbordeaux.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FAB2023_DOUBLE.pdf).

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