



# KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE, AND THE ARTIST'S VOICE IN CONTEMPORARY ART CONSERVATION

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**ABSTRACT** This paper seeks to disrupt the notion of the artist interview as 'score'. Using the term 'artist's voice' as opposed to 'artist's intention', the discussion moves beyond questions of authority to consider what can be learned from organisational theory's 'spiral of knowledge' as a method for listening to and learning from the artist's voice. How can knowledge be created and transferred for the purposes of conservation? This is a particularly pertinent question regarding tacit knowledge. Following Ikujiro Nonaka's SECI Model of Knowledge Dimensions, and his proposition of using figurative language, greater insight can be gained into artists' creative practices and legacy generation.

## Introduction

*Julien Schnabel:* Well, I guess everyone has his own vision of the world. Everybody has to be responsible for what they do.

*Sherri Levine:* It would be irresponsible if he didn't tell anyone about [his work]. It would be a ludicrous artistic endeavour (sic) unless he told people about it.

*JS:* You don't think it's enough just to do it?

*SL:* No, art is about communication.

*JS:* Can't it be communicated without it being anecdotal?

*SL:* It has to be articulated. It's not enough just to be a sensitive person.<sup>1</sup>

This exchange between artists Julien Schnabel and Sherri Levine in 1981 during a symposium entitled *Post-Modernism*, illustrates something of the underlying opinions surrounding the question of artistic communication. Whether or not artists ought to articulate their work verbally is not of main concern here, although the construction of effective communication will be addressed in

due course. This paper seeks to move beyond questions of the authority of the artist's voice to consider how the artist's tacit knowledge of the creation of the artwork can be shared for the purposes of its conservation. More recently the artist's voice has been invoked by conservators and curators through the methodology of qualitative interviewing, which will be addressed in the first part of this paper. Seeking to carve a space for reflexivity, this paper appeals to organisational theory's 'spiral of knowledge' as a method for listening to and learning from the artist's voice. How can knowledge be created and shared for the purposes of conservation, and is knowledge transference a one-way path? This is particularly pertinent regarding tacit knowledge. Following Ikujiro Nonaka's SECI Model of Knowledge Dimensions, and his proposition of using figurative language, greater insight can be gained into artists' creative practices.

## The artist interview as surrogate score?

It is fair to say that hearing from the artist has become an expectation. With increasingly affordable reel-to-reel tape

recorders by the 1960s, the interview became a ubiquitous tool of art journalists in understanding artists' work and its dissemination to the public. Television documentaries, YouTube channels and social media have normalised the search for the 'personality' behind the work, neatly packaged in digestible sound bites. Indeed, the American art critic Phyllis Tuchman acknowledged in 2008 that 'the artist interview seems so yesterday'.<sup>2</sup> Yet, over the past decade, the artist interview as methodology has been subsumed into the toolkit of the conservator of contemporary art. Its assimilation has gained authority and prevalence in conservation long after the interview became a common investigative device for many scholars in the social sciences, noting direct oral documentation as a source of primary information. In the introduction to the 2012 book *The Artist Interview* – the first textbook to provide a methodological guide to interviewing for conservation purposes – the authors celebrate that the interview allows us to 'tap the artist as a source of information'.<sup>3</sup>

Discourse surrounding the inclusion of this primary source material has tended to focus on questions of authority and validity, namely in relation to the artist's intent.<sup>4</sup> Martha Buskirk notes in her seminal book *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* that 'as the physical object has become increasingly unstable as a marker of what constitutes the work, the now all-important category that frames and gives meaning to this play of reference is artistic authorship'.<sup>5</sup> With the 'communicative turn' in conservation since the 1990s,<sup>6</sup> the conservation object has transitioned from an archaeological site of material evidence to a relativistic organism imbued with and exuding values to be mapped and facilitated.<sup>7</sup> This movement away from a positivistic approach towards a more qualitative understanding of the creation and care of an artwork has necessitated attention being given to the immaterial qualities that surround and are inherent in the work.<sup>8</sup> However, attempts to acknowledge the intangible and variable, while creating workable institutional systems, can seem like trying to bridge two incompatible realms or (to adapt the old adage) like having to fit a mutating polygonal peg into a round hole.

For many conservators working in museums, moving beyond an object-based approach to a values-based approach has necessitated the creation or adaptation of some form of stabilising parameters and notation, such as 'scoring' the work.<sup>9</sup> In cultural heritage preservation (to come back to our analogy with the archaeological site), Ioannis Poullos has critiqued this values-based approach, arguing that the inevitable conflict between relative values results in the increased power of one leading managing authority in the planning and implementation of the process.<sup>10</sup> He cites archaeologist Martha Demas, who notes that 'values-based approaches may become capable of being manipulated or, for the faint of heart, of being turned into formulas of rules'.<sup>11</sup> In a bid to institute the central importance of relationships to conservation practice, Dean Sully at UCL, London, initiated the Peoples-based Conservation Project (PBC) in 2002 in partnership with the National Trust and Maori community groups to establish a

strategic approach to long-term conservation management at Hinemihi, a historic Maori meeting house at Clandon Park, a National Trust property in Surrey. Characterised as female, Hinemihi is referred to as a living ancestor of the Ngati Hinemihi people. As such, PBC necessitated the questioning of the National Trust's conventional approach to Hinemihi as an 'ethnographic object', calling instead for a transfer of focus 'from material preservation to developing and preserving the connections between people, their cultural heritage, and each other'.<sup>12</sup> This approach, and that of living heritage, will be developed elsewhere in the context of contemporary art conservation.<sup>13</sup>

The mainstay of conservation literature remains tied to the 'logic of presence' and the structure of the two-stage artwork, citing the 'gap' between the score and its realisation as the allowance for material variation.<sup>14</sup> The aim remains to set the work free from the necessity of the artist's input for future reinstallation by codifying, and somehow capturing, the key to the work's distanced activation.<sup>15</sup> As such, the artist interview could be said to have become a partial surrogate for the score: the method by which delineating instructions are communicated and documented about the 'acceptable' presentation of the artwork in question.<sup>16</sup> This paper seeks to disrupt that notion. Using the term 'artist's voice' as opposed to 'artist's intention,' discussion will move beyond questions of authority to consider what can be learned from organisational theory's 'spiral of knowledge' as a method for listening to and learning from the artist's voice.

## The 'artist's voice'

I was first aware of the term 'artist's voice' when reading curator Katherine Kuh's book *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Modern Artists*, first published in New York in 1962.<sup>17</sup> Kuh appears at pains to present these artists' voices as unadulterated insights, deliberately editing herself out of their dissemination by representing her call to response simply as 'Question' and not by her name or initials. She seemingly avoids the 'glow of reflected glamour' emitted from the artist that Blazwick describes in her essay 'An anatomy of the interview'.<sup>18</sup> The subtitle of the book, *Talks with Seventeen Modern Artists*, further illustrates Kuh's attempt to defy the potentially prescriptive nature of an interview, the word 'talks' suggesting a more informal exchange. However, there is no such thing as transparent, disassociated questioning. The 'questioner' is implicated in the exchange simply by being there.

The artist interview is a construction, not a benign recording device. Oral historian Michael Roper highlights the subconscious 'internal worlds'<sup>19</sup> that surface during all interviews, 'the interview being by definition, a relationship'.<sup>20</sup> The subconscious influence of the narrator's background and relationships is met with counter-transference in the interviewer: 'a triggering of anxieties and conflicts from our own pasts, brought alive by the material in the interview'.<sup>21</sup> This reciprocal dynamic is inevitable

with a subjective source.<sup>22</sup> In relation to the interviews in the magazine *Avalanche*, Gwen Allen explained that, ‘a conversation between two people always exceeds the sum of its parts, that it takes place according to the logic of interactivity and reciprocity rather than objectivity’.<sup>23</sup> Here the original spelling of Andy Warhol’s magazine *Inter/View* seems particularly apt, identifying the mutual responsibility of narrator and interviewer for the outcome of the exchange.

It seems somewhat ironic, therefore, that such a reciprocal and subjective process should have become a trusted method with which to elicit and document the artist’s intent for conservation purposes. Yet ‘intent’ is now a standard of collections maintenance, as Uchill notes in the context of the United States, ‘since the Visual Artists Rights Act may be interpreted as having legislated its primacy in 1990’.<sup>24</sup> This dependency on the artist’s delineation of the artwork has become increasingly important as the ‘artist’s touch’ in the ‘physical process of making’ has become less evident, resulting in ‘the physical boundaries of the piece [having] to be reconceived each time they are exhibited’.<sup>25</sup> This de-materialisation<sup>26</sup> necessitates a delineating chord to its origin. After all, ‘with need comes necessity, and with necessity comes dependency’.<sup>27</sup> Tina Fiske explains this dependency as ‘tethering’, drawing on Derrida’s rationale: ‘In order for the tethering to the source to occur, what must be retained is the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.’<sup>28</sup> It seems that with the increasing relativity and variability of the ‘signature-event’, dependent tethering has been cast instead on the artist. While there has been some theoretical discussion in literature and the arts on the subject of intention, Vivian van Saaze asserts that, ‘in conservation practice and theory there is a strong insistence on the term “artist’s intentions”’.<sup>29</sup> Inevitably shaped by our contexts, conservation remains in its post-war methodological tracks, conditioned by the ‘logic of presence’ that necessitates a grasping towards quantification.<sup>30</sup> The theory of contemporary art conservation has taken strides in redefining the role of the conservator from surgeon to facilitator, documenter, and even co-producer. Yet conservation’s underlying practice, in many ways, remains unchanged: identifying the artwork’s ‘core identity’ in order to enable its continuation. This paper, however, suggests an expanded articulation and use of the artist’s voice in conservation by offering an understanding from organisational theory on how to create and share knowledge. Greater insight into the creative practices and legacy generation of interviewed artists lies in wait.

### Listening for the artist’s voice<sup>31</sup>

In 1990, art historian Martin Kemp cautioned against the quantifying of intentions:

All this potential for defining original intentions should not lead us to believe that they are like a

recipe for a cake, which, if mixed in the right proportions and properly cooked, will inevitably produce a product with a certain appearance and flavour. Any artist’s intentions ... will be a complex and shifting compound of conscious and unconscious aspirations, adjustments, re-definitions, acts of chance and evasions. It is unlikely that there was ever a stable set of transparently accessible intentions.<sup>32</sup>

This acknowledgment of the evasive accessibility of intentions differs from the stance that the variable nature of the source renders it undesirable and ineffectual.<sup>33</sup> Instead he is warning against a reductionist approach to the artist’s intentions. Trying to pin down intent in the form of sanctions,<sup>34</sup> or rely predominantly on ‘work-defining properties’ to reinstall an artwork<sup>35</sup> is understandable when tasked with facilitating an institutional future for an artwork that defies material presence. Yet creating a work of art rarely follows such delineation. Duchamp described the ‘creative act’ as a series of ‘subjective reactions’:

In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic (sic) plane.<sup>36</sup>

The difficulty, then, is how to garner usable information from the artist, who may yet need to process beyond the subconscious the creation of the artwork and all its significances. For some, this has been a reason to question the validity of the artist’s voice in the process of conservation.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the rule of thumb is to interview the artist as close to the moment of acquisition or installation as possible. Inevitably, at this early stage in the biography of the work<sup>38</sup> and its ‘becoming’,<sup>39</sup> the ‘compound of conscious and unconscious aspirations, adjustments, re-definitions, acts of chance and evasions’, as noted above, are still being played out. An alternative perspective on the artist’s voice and the transference of knowledge for the purposes of conservation seems necessary.

### The spiral of knowledge

How are we to glean information from such an evasive source, let alone use that information to understand the artist’s creative processes and appropriate care of the artwork? To address this question, it is important to consider the type of knowledge this primary source offers and how it is communicated. Michael Polanyi’s expression ‘tacit’ knowledge has been referenced in conservation literature as a way of recognising implicit knowledge that is elusive and hard to document.<sup>40</sup> It has become an expression uprooted from its semantic anchor and is in danger of being used vacantly. Polanyi’s account of tacit knowledge implies it is always personal, as Reinders identifies in the context of the

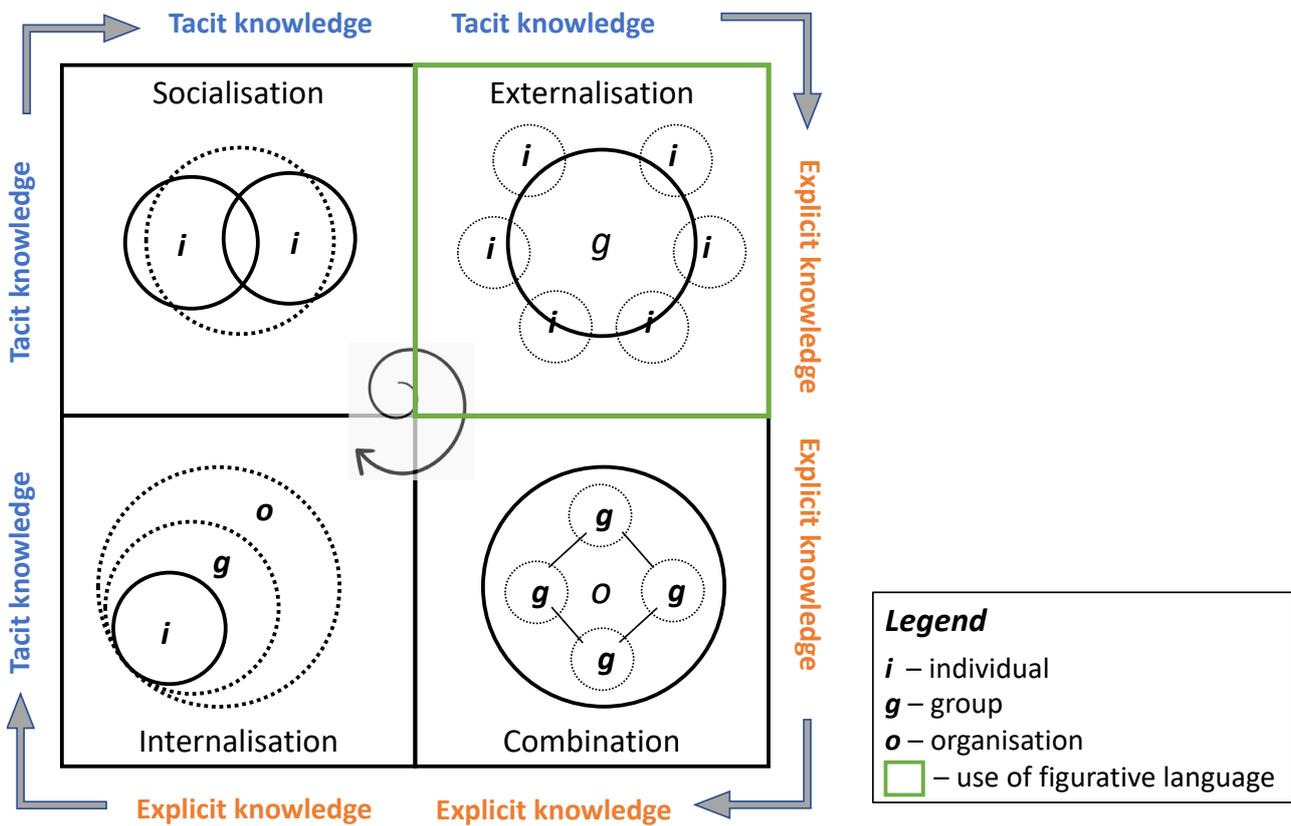


Figure 1 Illustration based on Ikujiro Nonaka's SECI Model of Knowledge Dimensions.

care sector, 'because it involves the knower as a person'.<sup>41</sup> This means that it is a knowledge not easily transferrable. In relation to the practice of connoisseurship, David Ebitz, similarly referencing Polanyi's description of tacit knowledge, acknowledged that, 'the possessor of this skill is unable to determine the rules which govern his or her performance and therefore is unable to articulate these rules for others to learn and follow'.<sup>42</sup> These ingrained conventions consist of technical skill, cognitive action, beliefs and context, which orient one's perspective yet are simultaneously and equally challenging to plot.

In order to communicate, there needs to be a shared language. For example, in football – often prized for breaking down barriers of language – a meaningful exchange (and productive match) can only occur when players share an understanding of the conventions of the game. Semiotics 101 tells us that symbolic signs operate successfully only if the sign has a 'reader' familiar with agreed conventions.<sup>43</sup> This observation takes on multiple implications here: there are conventions underpinning verbal exchange (i.e. artist interview); conventions for reading a work of art (to be understood by the audience, art critic, art historian, curator, conservator); conventions of creative practice (within an individual's oeuvre as well as contextual culture); conventions of institutional ecology; even conventions for breaking those conventions (think of the language of Dadaism or Cage's Indeterminacy). For the purposes of this paper it is not the *product* (decision-making models and conservation treatment) or *object* of this communication (the artwork's care or the artist's sanctions) that is to

be discussed: it is the *system* by which the potential communication takes place that is to be questioned.

Those charged with the care of variable artworks need to understand how they can be activated, reinstalled or reperformed in the future. This requires insight about the creative context in which they were sanctioned. The artist's tacit knowledge – that knowledge that 'cannot be reduced to scientific theories or models' – is vital to this understanding. However, Reinders continues, 'the connection between knower and what is known cannot be severed without loss'.<sup>44</sup> So how can this loss be mitigated? I suggest that we need more than a thorough interview methodology and ethics. A helpful starting point might be to look at other models for studying knowledge management. This has taken me to the research of eminent Japanese organisational theorist Ikujiro Nonaka. Nonaka and Takeuchi introduced the SECI model which has become the cornerstone of knowledge creation and transfer theory in business.<sup>45</sup> Particularly interesting is their assertion that explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge are continuously converted and created as individuals practice, collaborate and interact. This is a dynamic process rather than a static model, which they refer to as a 'spiral of knowledge'.

Nonaka explains that there are four basic patterns for creating knowledge (the SECI model):

1 *Socialisation (tacit to tacit)*

Tacit knowledge cannot easily be transcribed into instructions so it is obtained through shared experience with those who possess such knowledge.

This may involve practice, imitation, guidance, and observation.

#### 2 *Externalisation (tacit to explicit)*

This knowledge is somehow extracted into the shape of explicit documents, instructions or frameworks, allowing it to be shared and transferred.

#### 3 *Combination (explicit to explicit)*

The explicit knowledge is merged with other new or latent explicit knowledge to create something new, such as new processes, new documents, new prototypes.

#### 4 *Internalisation (explicit to tacit)*

Explicit knowledge is then internalised by other individuals who use it to extend and reframe their own tacit knowledge, applying it in their daily work and decision making.

The visual prompt of Figure 1 signifies the dynamic and generative process of an artwork's ongoing making and the artist's potential engagement with other stakeholders, and vice versa. The first step of *Socialisation* indicates that shared experiences need to take place. This would tend to take place between the artist and the conservator – as well as other key actants<sup>46</sup> such as curators, technicians, artist assistants, registrars, digital content curators, collection managers – during the installation of the artwork.<sup>47</sup> This is when non-verbal actions can be observed, such as the interaction of the artist and assistants with the material presence of the work, and informal exchanges and clarifications can take place. Conservators may even engage corporeally by becoming 'delegated performers' of the work in order to understand more fully the 'embodied knowledge' required for the work's future communication, as did conservator Hélia Marçal when working with Portuguese artist Francisco Tropa.<sup>48</sup> Unlike tacit knowledge, embodied knowledge specifically refers to a type of knowledge where the body knows how to act: 'the knowledge seems to be imprinted in one's body'.<sup>49</sup> This cannot be learned in theory, only through practice. The methodology of reconstructions in technical art history has been seen as a way to transfer or gain that experiential knowledge of making.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Jill Sterrett has called for the ongoing *practice* of the reinstallation of artworks before that embodied knowledge is lost to inactivity.<sup>51</sup> Large institutions such as Tate and SFMOMA have spaces designated for such activity. Smaller collections may need to be more creative in gaining and retaining such knowledge, or simply suffice with audio-visual documentation of these initial interactions as aide-mémoire to trigger that knowledge previously imprinted. The danger is that this falls into the age-old trap of potential reductionism.

Such documentation and experience of practice fulfils the second step of *Externalisation*. In creating a form of record of the encounter (e.g. film, photographs, even autoethnographic journal entry<sup>52</sup>) this socialisation is converted into a form that is able to be shared. This is where the majority of the 'loss' that Reinders spoke of takes place. Much like the energy lost in successive trophic levels of a food chain, the available tacit knowledge decreases from

one knowledge conversion to the next. That does not, however, stop the tertiary consumers being a fundamental cog in the pyramid of biomass. Externalisation also leads to *Combination*, which is one of the strengths of the conservation community: the sharing of findings and explicit knowledge. In recent years exemplars of this collective knowledge transfer in contemporary art conservation would be networks such as the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA),<sup>53</sup> the Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art Research (NeCCAR),<sup>54</sup> the Artist Archives Initiative (founded at New York University),<sup>55</sup> and initiatives such as *New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* (NACCA),<sup>56</sup> not to mention the countless conferences and symposia that take place all over the world. Combination, however, needs to be considered not only within the practice and profession of conservation but also, and perhaps significantly, within the organisation/institution as a whole. Sociologists Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell would suggest that these networks of stakeholders and professional associations are a vehicle for the 'definition and promulgation of normative rules about organizational and professional behavior'.<sup>57</sup> The constituent Externalisation process of the SECI model, then, could be said to be a mechanism for normative isomorphism: the gradual congruence of norms and values of those networks effecting isomorphic change.<sup>58</sup> How conservation propagates and relates to these norms needs further study, as well as how it can begin to unlearn and challenge those norms.

The *Internalisation* process in conservation is seemingly intangible compared to the process of externalisation because it involves individual engagement. This fourth step calls for the internalising of documented explicit knowledge of prior tacit socialisations. Practitioners taking steps to communicate that element of reflection and reflexivity in the discipline of conservation acknowledge the existential process of internalising and digesting new experiences in order to inform extant practice.<sup>59</sup> Within the field of environmental conservation science, Montana et al. appeal that 'attention needs to be given to the enabling conditions for reflexivity and the practical steps that can be taken to enact forms of reflexivity that are appropriate within the existing frameworks'.<sup>60</sup> Nurturing a culture of reflexivity requires an isomorphic shift in the structuration of conservation from professional training programmes to institutional practice.

Particularly critical steps in this spiral of knowledge are Externalisation (converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge) and Internalisation (using that explicit knowledge to extend one's own tacit knowledge base).<sup>61</sup> This is because, 'both require the active involvement of the self – that is, personal commitment'.<sup>62</sup> After all, as we have already identified, tacit knowledge is always personal. The key question, it seems, is how to enable that Externalisation – how to convert an individual's tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge – then how to expand and 're-personalise' that extracted knowledge? This will be explored in the context of the conservation artist interview.

## SECI Model of Knowledge Dimensions and the conservation artist interview

To convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge means finding a way to express the inexpressible. Unfortunately, one of the most powerful management tools for doing so is also among the most frequently overlooked: the store of figurative language and symbolism that managers can draw from to articulate their intuitions and insights.<sup>63</sup>

The 'inexpressible' essentially is what interviewers are seeking when asking for the artist's insights about the artwork's creation and care. It is that embodied knowledge held by the artist (physically, cognitively and intuitively) that is sought to unlock the secrets of the ineffable artwork: those actions and impulses, those subconscious ticks and subliminal decisions, that birth the artwork into being (whether or not this happens before, during or after the work is first presented). We are already adopting figurative language which, Nonaka suggests, we must embrace.

### *Metaphor*

The first kind of figurative language he suggests we use is 'metaphor':

I don't just mean a grammatical structure or allegorical expression. Rather, metaphor is a distinctive method of perception. It is a way for individuals grounded in different contexts and with different experiences to understand something intuitively through the use of imagination and symbols without the need for analysis or generalization.<sup>64</sup>

This form of figurative language gives individuals a new way of expressing what they know innately yet cannot easily express in words. It is a first stage in embedding commitment to creativity in the process of knowledge creation, as Nonaka commends. He cites linguistic philosopher Max Black who described metaphor as 'two ideas in one phrase',<sup>65</sup> which establishes a connection between two seemingly disparate things, forging an inevitable conflict. This conflict, Nonaka affirms, sparks the creative process: 'As employees try to define more clearly the insight that the metaphor expresses, they work to reconcile the conflicting meanings. That is the first step in making the tacit explicit.'<sup>66</sup> The example he gives is of Hiroo Watanabe's slogan, Theory of Automobile Evolution, which he explains combines two ideas one would not normally think of together: the automobile as manmade machine and the theory of evolution, which relates to living organisms. The discrepancy between the two thoughts provides a productive metaphor by which the characteristics of the ideal car can be explored.

From the artist interviews I have conducted an exchange comes to mind that illustrates the adoption of metaphor.

Karla Black's work has conflict at its core by making precious that which can be thrown away.<sup>67</sup> She creates abstract and immersive sculptures using everyday raw materials to explore our experiences and understanding of the world. During our interview in 2009, Black described her work-in-general as 'a listening type of work'.<sup>68</sup> To describe the work as 'listening' invokes another form of figurative language: anthropomorphism. This in itself is metaphorical, as it applies an active sense on an inanimate object (or assemblage of materials). Contradiction also lies in the tension between the work holding inciteful content, such as feminist and political protest, while remaining mute. In relation to the work *Contact Isn't Lost* (2008) Black explained:

All the stuff that's still in it, I think it's probably really political, it's probably really emotional, it has a lot of feminist stuff in it; it's a big sort of protest and it does that really physically. But it does loads of pushing away and gives people hardly any tiny little space to walk in ... they're not allowed to come too close to it ... but it has to not have the ... It's not the sort of work that shouts, you know; that sort of screaming hysterical, political work that's really based in language ... It is all that, but muted.<sup>69</sup>

The only way to convey these tensions inherent in the work is to invoke the use of metaphor. In line with Nonaka's example, what are the speculative characteristics of the work that this platform of metaphor provokes? What can this figurative language tell us about the artist's creative practice that will be helpful in assuring the continuity of the work?

### *Analogy*

These questions, prompted by metaphor, are only the first steps towards the extraction of explicit knowledge. Having laid bare competing descriptors of the work, at this point 'analogy' takes over with a more structured process of reconciliation. As Nonaka explains, 'by clarifying how the two ideas in one phrase actually are alike and not alike, the contradictions incorporated into metaphors are harmonized by analogy'.<sup>70</sup> In this sense, analogy walks the line between revelation and rationale. Black even offers her own analogy of the work and a psychoanalyst:

I do like to think about psychoanalysis, about the analysts themselves ... how they don't ever speak, so they're just a physical presence in a room. So, I try to think about the work as being more of a sort of listening type of work.<sup>71</sup>

Following Nonaka's model, it will be stimulating to explore how *Contact Isn't Lost* is and is not like a psychoanalyst. The first difference is obvious: the artwork is not human, thus cannot respond overtly to the visitor. If dialogue and

interpretation were not a fundamental element of psychotherapy, a mannequin could just as well take the therapist's place. Having said that, the similarities in the analogy are enlightening. While the analyst does have a physical presence in the room (like the artwork), therapeutic method instructs that the analyst will not speak until the patient (or artwork's visitor) opens communication. The analyst's primary function is to listen to the patient's thoughts. The analyst may respond in time, but there are boundaries to be respected. Similarly, the artwork makes itself vulnerable in order to facilitate an emotional and cognitive engagement. The analyst is not a blank vessel without content, but is not so opinionated or invasive that the patient has no space for their own thoughts and experiences. This sounds like Black's description of her work: 'It does hold all that stuff within it, but it's not so personalised and so opinionated ... or invasive in any way that a person can't sort of come to it and just have it belong to them, basically, and be their experience.'<sup>72</sup>

### Model

Nonaka's final step in the knowledge-creation process is the creation of an actual model. This is where methodological conventions of business strategy and knowledge engineering are appeased and fulfilled. The constraints of this paper will not accommodate a comprehensive unpacking of a model to embody these crystallising ideas (although there is scope to explore modelling elsewhere in relation to 'knowledge capital').<sup>73</sup> Suffice to say, Nonaka's suggested goal at this stage in the knowledge-creation process is to make this knowledge available to others using straightforward, logical specifications or concepts. For this initial foray with these ideas, I propose simple statements of assertion. They are not sanctions for the work but are guiding principles that share something of the character of the work, not dissimilar to the Nara Document's dimensions of 'spirit and feeling':

- *Contact Isn't Lost* should be presented in a way that evades over-interpretation (signalling the importance of interpretative space for the visitor – the work does not 'shout').
- *Contact Isn't Lost* should have a confronting presence, while remaining vulnerable.
- *Contact Isn't Lost* must have a physical presence.
- *Contact Isn't Lost* should appear materially fragile while simultaneously commanding the exhibition space.
- *Contact Isn't Lost* should appear 'fresh'.

These statements are by no means definitive and are simply a starting point for illustrative purposes. They represent an extraction of knowledge from this short clip from Black's musings about the work. They can then be fed back into the SECI model to be internalised by the artist and those charged with the care of *Contact Isn't Lost* (The National Galleries of Scotland).<sup>74</sup> As such, these statements of assertion can be linked with explicit instructions where applicable. For

example, in the accompanying guidelines for *Contact Isn't Lost*, specific spatial parameters for the work in relation to the display space have been developed and documented by the artist and conservation team so that future installations can operate from those given dimensions with the view to invoke a 'confronting presence'.

### Conclusion

The three terms ('metaphor', 'analogy' and 'model') may be symbiotic and hard to distinguish from one another, but they demonstrate the process of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge: 'first, by linking contradictory things and ideas through metaphor; then, by resolving these contradictions through analogy; and, finally, by crystallizing the created concepts and embodying them in a model'.<sup>75</sup> Where this parallelism is found wanting for our purposes is the final step of creating a model. This reductive process may defy the underlying intention of augmenting the nascent expansion of communication and knowledge management, retreating to familiar 'quantifiables' such as minimum and maximum room dimensions and light levels. With the creation of a model comes the inevitable pull towards compliance, which takes us back to isomorphic homogenisation. The pitfalls here would be the presentation of the distillations of the artist's voice as objective parameters with a creation of and reliance on a 'known' identity of the artwork. Instead, the SECI Model of Knowledge Dimensions enables the artist's voice, primarily mooted in interview, to be listened to and engaged with through figurative language, rooting it in creativity and imagination. This sounds a far cry from systems and guidelines and models. As such, it may feel uncomfortable to those grounded in quantitative methods. Yet this does not need to be an 'either or'. With the growing recognition of conservation's interdisciplinary core, a whole tool box of methods is available for use. As ever, a case-by-case approach needs to be taken in order to avoid reaching for the wrong proverbial implement.

Admittedly in its early stages, this appeal to knowledge management and figurative language has room to grow. This would be particularly interesting in relation to knowledge engineering models, which may be useful when considering practices of knowledge transfer and dissemination within conservation and the art institution. The artist's voice remains a vital source of primary information on the artwork. However, the temptation to codify and make reinstallation recipes based on what is voiced must be avoided. To do so skips important steps in the 'spiral of knowledge' that must be worked through. Jumping straight from tacit knowledge – or even figurative language – to explicit knowledge does not allow for the seeds of information to be processed fully and become the start of the creation of further tacit knowledge. It would seem amiss to forgo this opportunity, despite the undeniable wrench of setting down well-worn quantitative tools. The same could be said within the fields of social sciences and business, where statistics and quality measuring tools are rooted deep. This kernel

of knowledge management may prove fruitful if expanded and explored further in the context of conservation. Artists are, after all, comfortable communicating in the figurative sense; perhaps conservation could meet them with this shared language.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

1. Katzeff et al. 2006: 94.
2. Tuchman 2008: 33.
3. Beerkens et al. 2012: 11. Prior to this publication the only guidelines for conducting artist interviews in conservation were: INCCA, *Guide to Good Practice: Artists' Interviews* (Amsterdam, 2002) and ICN/SBMK, *Concept Scenario: Artists' Interviews* (1999).
4. See for example: Althöfer 1985; Dykstra 1996; Mancusi-Ungaro 1999; Irvin 2005; Van Saaze 2009; Gordon and Hermens 2013; Quabeck 2019.
5. Buskirk 2005: 113.
6. Muñoz Viñas 2005, especially 'Chapter 1: What is Conservation', 1–23. See also Michalski 1994.
7. For example, in reference to performance see: Holbrook 2018. Regarding installation see: Van de Vall et al. 2011. The case of *No Ghost Just a Shell* is illuminating, thinking about 'biography' and 'trajectory' of multimedia art: Wolff 2011.
8. The Nara Conference in 1994 and its resultant Document on Authenticity is cited as being the first charter to promote an expanded understanding of authenticity in intangible cultural heritage: UNESCO 1994.
9. Brian Castriota helpfully discusses the 'score' in contemporary art conservation in his paper for this issue. Note that he cites the following for discussions of the score in the context of installation and time-based media artworks: Viola 1999; Van Wegen 1999; Rinehart 2004; Laurenson 2004; MacDonald 2009; Phillips 2015; Van de Vall 2015.
10. He acknowledges that inevitably that role tends to be filled by the conservator: Poullos 2010: 173.
11. Demas 2002, cited in Poullos 2010: 173.
12. REF 2014 Impact Case Study. 'Peoples-based conservation: Caring for Hinemihi, the Maori meeting house at Clendon Park, UK.' Available at: <https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=39944> (accessed 18 January 2021). A volume was published on these approaches in 2007, with contributions from the main participants of the PBC project: Sully 2007.
13. Together with Hélia Marçal and Renata F. Peters, I facilitated the forum, *Heritage, Participation, Performativity, Care*, in March 2021 with generous support from the UCL Centre for Critical Heritage Studies: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/critical-heritage-studies/>. Further research is being developed from this seed project specifically in relation to contemporary art.
14. Tina Fiske's perceptive recognition of the importance of absence and difference in the multiplicity of the artwork is a key exception: Fiske 2009. For discussion of the allographic, see: Laurenson 2006; Phillips 2015; Pillow 2003; Goodman 1969.
15. Distanciation is a term that describes the process through which a work of art, particularly a literary work, becomes distanced from its creator, taking on an autonomous life of its own. Barthes discussed this detachment in his seminal essay 'The death of the author', stating that the way the author 'is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child' (Barthes 1977: 145). He implies that the author, just like a parent, becomes superfluous when the work, or child, is ready to be sent out into the world. At the work's coming of age the author recedes into the background, a vital role having been played, with the baton of authority now ready to be passed to the work and its relationship with the audience. See also Ricoeur 1981.
16. I say 'partial surrogate' as there are other methods used by conservators to gain delineating knowledge from the artist for the artwork, such as certificates of authenticity (see Buskirk 2005), contracts, and guidelines, as well as in some circumstances long-term working relationships that hold tacit knowledge. For further discussion on score creation and compliance see Brian Castriota's article in this issue.
17. Kuh [1962] 2000.
18. Blazwick 2007: 26.
19. Roper 2003: 23.
20. Roper 2003: 21.
21. Roper explores this topic in relation to interviews with psychoanalytic psychotherapists. In discussing transference and counter-transference he draws on Kleinian theory and cites Karl Figlio's research into psychoanalysis and oral history: Figlio 1988. See Roper 2003: 21.
22. This dynamic is what Michael Frisch called a 'shared authority': Frisch 1990.
23. Allen 2005: 58.
24. Uchill 2013: 64. This is the case, despite the fact that 'artist's intention' is not mentioned by any of the conservation codes of ethics directly.
25. Buskirk 2005: 16.
26. Krauss 1979; Lippard 1997.
27. Reinders 2010: 37.
28. Derrida 1988: 20 cited in Fiske 2009: 233.
29. Van Saaze asserts that in her view 'artist's intent' is something done in practice and is a collaborative affair: '[Artist's intent] is the result of what is *done* in knowledge and documentation practices. This implies that rather than being a facilitator or "passive custodian", the curator or conservator of contemporary art can be considered an interpreter, mediator or even a co-producer of what is designated as "the artist's intention": Van Saaze 2013: 117. I have also discussed the authority of the artist's intent at length: Gordon 2011, chapter 2.
30. Clavir 1998: 3.
31. The phrase 'listening for' is used here to describe an active concentration and anticipation in order to hear something expected. As an audience, we expect to hear from the artist.
32. Kemp 1990: 18.
33. This was first put forth by Wimsatt and Beardsley in literary criticism: Wimsatt and Beardsley [1946] 1962. Dykstra discussed their findings in relation to conservation: Dykstra 1996.
34. Irvin 2005.
35. Laurenson 2006.
36. Duchamp 1957: 28.
37. See for example: Sommermeyer 2011; Grüin 2011; Muñoz Viñas 2020.
38. Van de Vall *et al.* 2011.
39. Marçal 2019; MacNeil and Mak 2007.

40. Polanyi 1966. Salvador Muñoz Viñas uses the phrase ‘tacit knowledge’ in relation to the conservator, to describe their “knowledge beyond the covers of books”: Muñoz Viñas 2005: 141. Hummelen and Scholte adopt the phrase, although they use it as a descriptor, making no reference to Polanyi: Hummelen and Scholte 2004. MacDonald uses ‘tacit knowledge’ helpfully to discuss the documentation of practice in *Variable Media Art*: MacDonald 2009. Dekker cites Polanyi in passing: Dekker 2018: 44. Vivian van Saaze instead cites Gilbert Ryle who, in his book *The Concept of Mind*, distinguished between ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’; ‘knowing how’ referring to ‘the kind of knowledge involved in action and movement whereas “knowing that” is a knowledge of facts and information (Ryle 1949, 25–61)’; Van Saaze 2013: 140.
41. Reinders 2010: 31.
42. Ebitz 1988: 209.
43. Peirce 1885. See also Krauss 1977.
44. Reinders 2010: 32.
45. Nonaka 1991.
46. That is, ‘something that acts or to which activity is granted by others’; see Latour 1996: 373.
47. Artists tend not to be present for deinstallation, unless there are specific needs or concerns.
48. Marçal and Nogueira 2015. See also Macedo et al. 2012.
49. Tanaka 2011: 149. Merleau-Ponty described it as ‘knowledge in the hands’ or ‘knowledge bred of familiarity’ (*savoir de familiarité*), suggesting the gaining of knowledge *through* the body with repetitive action: Merleau-Ponty 1962.
50. Hermens 2012.
51. Sterrett explains: ‘Why? Because, we actually have to test our knowledge of installing these pieces. They’re only parts in storage until we put them together. They become the art according to a set of instructions that we get from the artist. If you put the work in storage and don’t display it for ten years, you’ve diminished your ability to keep it because you might not be able to install it properly’: Gale et al. 2009.
52. Stigter 2016.
53. INCCA: <https://www.incca.org/> (accessed 16 February 2020).
54. NeCCAR: <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/neccar-network-conservation-contemporary-art-research> (accessed 16 February 2020).
55. The Artist Archive Initiative creates artist-specific resources (such as The David Wojnarowicz Knowledge Base and The Joan Jonas Knowledge Base), and stimulates discussion through symposia, workshops, and publications: <http://artist.archives.hosting.nyu.edu/Initiative/> (accessed 16 February 2020).
56. NACCA: <http://nacca.eu/> (accessed 16 February 2020).
57. DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 152.
58. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this paper for pointing me in the direction of sociological isomorphism, though space is lacking to discuss it further here.
59. See for example Stigter 2016 and Marçal et al. 2013. I have also greatly benefited from discussion with Pip Laurenson about reflective and reflexive practice in conservation and collections care research.
60. Montana et al. 2020: 218.
61. Nonaka 1991.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Max Black cited in Nonaka 1991.
66. Ibid.
67. Karla Black interview with Rebecca Gordon, digital video and audio recording, Glasgow, 16 February 2009, 00:56:55.
68. Ibid: 01:18:46.
69. Ibid: 01:18:46.
70. Nonaka 1991.
71. Karla Black interview with Rebecca Gordon, digital video and audio recording, Glasgow, 16 February 2009, 01:21:22.
72. Ibid: 01:21:22.
73. ‘Knowledge capital’ can be described as an ‘intangible asset’ for a company, including intellectual capital, relationships, learned techniques, procedures and innovations. As an introduction to the concept of ‘knowledge capital’ in business management see: Ermine 2018. Brian Castriota also used Karla Black’s *Contact Isn’t Lost* as a case study for his doctoral thesis (2019), by which he challenged the applicability of ‘score compliance’ (see Chapter 3, p. 59, where he suggests a manifestation of the artwork has the potential to be ‘kind of authentic’).
74. The National Galleries of Scotland have already initiated ‘socialisation’: Patrick Elliott, Senior Curator of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, conducted video documentation during Black’s installation of *Contact Isn’t Lost* in Room 5 of the Gallery of Modern Art between 18 and 21 November 2008. The spoken interaction between Black and Elliott has been transcribed by a conservation intern. It appears the other dimensions of the ‘spiral of knowledge’ are yet to be fully realised from this initial socialisation.
75. Nonaka 1991.

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