Notes on Authenticity

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Herb Stovel's "Notes on Authenticity" is a paper prepared for the UNESCO/ICOMOS authenticity meeting at Bergen, Norway in January-February 1994, itself a preparatory meeting for the conference on authenticity held at Nara, Japan in November 1994. As well as examining general issues of world-wide relevance, the paper presents a number of authenticity issues arising from particular perceptions of heritage and conservation valid in North America. The author asks for a clearer understanding of the links between value and authenticity, and stresses the need to articulate authenticity criteria rooted in respect for dynamic practices. Relevance to World Heritage evaluation and monitoring is developed through reference to World Heritage sites as well as cultural landscapes which may become eligible for World Heritage status. The Venice Charter is criticised for not including 'respect for cultural values' as a starting point, but the author proposes, not the abandonment of the Venice Charter, but the development of a new document appropriate for the global realities and complexities of our age.

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Introduction

The notes-in-progress which follow are meant to help structure an agenda for discussion which will bring greater clarity and practical sense to our use of the authenticity concept in conservation practice. It is a basic premise within the paper that it is both useful and possible to apply authenticity in practical ways to decision-making, with a reasonable degree of objectivity, in order that our decisions about appropriate treatment for historic buildings may be defended as credible and consistent. Although the paper both begins and concludes with examination of some general issues and perceptions of relevance on a global scale, it makes no pretence of offering universal answers for the questions raised. More particularly, the paper attempts to fill out the global debate by presenting a number of authenticity issues and concerns which arise from particular perceptions of heritage and conservation valid in North America.

The paper's conclusions, as well as affirming belief in the value of an approach identifying a number of universal constants in this area, attempt to suggest a framework for examination of important questions which could help structure much needed dialogues on the subject within ICOMOS over the next several years. Although the relevance of these discussions to World Heritage evaluation and monitoring is developed through reference to World Heritage sites, the observations made are meant to be of

practical relevance to the broad heritage conservation field.

General Concerns

The issues that arise in looking at the application of authenticity concepts to effective conservation decision-making are best examined within the larger context of the field's body of guiding principles. This is particularly important in 1994, given the growing numbers of conservation individuals and groups expressing considerable unease about the state of the field's doctrinal texts. This apparent unease for practitioners may have its source in a number of related perceptions.

Concern for limited objectivity

Conservation preferences have alternated between 'unity of style' approaches characteristic of Viollet-le-Duc, and the 'hands-off' approaches of Ruskin and Morris from the early 19th century on. Swings back and forth between these two poles have continued throughout the course of this century, suggesting that the 'right approach' has less to do with absolute objectivity than the biases or perceived values of a society at a point in time. In 1994, it is fairly clear that the pendulum has swung toward caution: conservationists are generally unwilling to impose their judgements on sites if these might compromise the right of future generations to re-examine the same. In practical terms, that means at present among experienced professionals a growing commitment to 'minimum intervention' and to interest in the material aspects of authenticity.

Concern for universality

To its credit, ICOMOS has pursued the search for universal doctrinal references throughout its history. The regional, national, and scientific charters meant to accompany the Venice Charter have represented a commitment to extension and adaptation of central conservation doctrine to respond to varying circumstances and needs. But in spite of those efforts, considerable questioning of the degree to which our doctrinal tenets are imposing cultural values on others has recently taken place.

ICOMOS examined this issue in its most recant General Assembly in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and concluded as it has done before: yes, there are universal constants in the field. Indeed ICOMOS's legitimacy as a global organisation rests on this assumption — that there are some principles and practices of sufficient universal worth to respond well to the fullest range of demands placed on them.

Fresh influences entering conservation discussions

The concept of 'heritage' has broadened immeasurably over the last two decades in most jurisdictions. The implications of this widening are felt in at least two significant ways:

Typologically, many of the 'newer' (that is, newly defined) categories of heritage embrace the popular (vernacular architecture), the wide-spread (cultural landscapes) or that related to the mass-produced (industrial heritage) and demand new flexibility in articulation of relevant principles. It is clear that the ICOMOS International Vernacular Committees's 1985 efforts to develop a charter for vernacular architecture misunderstood these demands in their attempt to begin their document with 'Monuments of Vernacular Architecture '. It is equally clear too in a later document produced by the same Committee (the little known Charter of Bokrijk - one of ICOMOS' best unpublished charters) that the essence of the vernacular challenge had eventually been grasped in the attention given to conservation of 'process' as the key to conservation of significant vernacular values.

The expansion of heritage to embrace expressions representative of all aspects of human endeavour (rather than just the monumental) has also brought new demands. As heritage has become broadly popular, the public have insisted on leading efforts to clarify the definition of heritage and the means to care for it. Democratisation has meant for many professionals a vulgarisation of both analysis and the presentation of meaning. But in many more instances, it has also provoked the most useful questions that can be asked in working with the past: what meaning does the past hold for us? What obligations does concern with the past bring? A concern for accurate and honest representation? Is fidelity to suggestive symbolism enough? Who decides?

A lack of common language in professional debate and dialogue

One of the most difficult problems in contemporary doctrinal exchange is the lack of shared understanding of the various doctrinal works and concepts used among

conservation professionals. The generalised and assumed understandings of those ideas that held when the Venice Charter was proclaimed is no longer adequate, given the proliferation of groups attempting in their respective contexts to articulate appropriate principles, standards and guidelines, and the greater precision required to be effective. ICOMOS has made many efforts, at various levels and within various jurisdications, to build consensus around the key words necessary for doctrinal clarity; however, linguistic, cultural and practical differences among those involved have always limited agreement. But without the common base which a shared understanding of definitions could provide, debates on doctrinal principles will continue to fail to reach desired objectives.

More specifically, it is equally important to look at concerns arising from attempts to apply the authenticity criterion to evaluation of World Heritage Sites. A number of significant problems arise here.

Concern for the definition of authenticity

Those who seek to apply this concept in World Heritage nomination analysis usually find available guidance in use and definition of the word to be inadequate. While it is usually possible to recognise that the authenticity criteria is meant to measure the extent to which values defined in choice of cultural criteria are complete (or present or whole or real) within the site, there is little more guidance to be found. And unlike the World Heritage cultural criteria, for which years of experience in reasoning and use provide a body of comparative jurisprudence, the application of the test of authenticity has left no body of decision-making evidence which could build over time to bring greater precision to application of the 'test' of authenticity. Hence opinions in this area are almost inevitably idiosyncratic and potentially flawed.

One advance would be a clearer understanding among conservation professionals of the links between value (the sources of meaning) in sites and the authenticity manifest in a site (the integrity of meaning). Are these complementary (in an additive sense?) or merely serial (that is, criteria to be applied separately)? Can either or both be exclusionary of defining cultural significance or interest? (For example, if sites of strong values possess questionable authenticity, does overall significance lessen? does strength in authenticity increase cultural significance?).

Without clarification of the nature of this fundamental relationship — cultural values and authenticity/integrity between values and the genuineness of the manifestation of those values (physical or otherwise), advances in clarity of thinking and practice will be difficult.

The limits of scope of the four authenticities

It would be useful to understand the thinking of the World Heritage Convention's custodians in the late 1970's when the Convention's Operational Guidelines first articulated the need to ensure sites met 'the test of authenticity' in 'design, materials, workmanship or setting'. The lack of explicit guidance within the Guidelines has led inevitably to personal interpretations of intent.

Knut Einar Larsen's excellent Authenticity and Reconstruction: Architectural Preservation in Japan acknowledges the four authenticities but goes on to note that 'it is not the original formal concept which is regarded as authentic, but the building as it has been handed down to us through history'. In describing the 'do as little as possible approach' Larsen characterises contemporary preservation aimed at retention of the 'material authenticity of the historic building as it has been left to us by history'.

Jukka Jokilehto and Sir Bernard Feilden's Management Guidelines for World Cultural Sites focus on material authenticity in two areas: *materials* ('original building material, historical stratigraphy, evidence and marks made by impact of significant phases in history and the process of ageing (patina of age)'); and *workmanship* — ('substance and signs of original building technology and techniques of treatment in materials and structures'). But also they go further; in discussing, for example, the aim of treatment for authenticity in *design*, they suggest the need 'to respect the design intentions of the original structure, architecture, urban or rural complex'.

Larsen interprets David Lowenthal's well known quote, 'As long as form persists, authenticity veers between shape and substance' as focusing on two aspects of material authenticity. My first reading of the same statement suggested it to be a re-statement of the ongoing debate concerning the degree to which aesthetic and/or historic values should dominate a debate between outward form and building fabric, between — in the words of the Operational Guidelines — "design" and "materials".

If authenticity is accepted as complementary to values then it would seem useful to ensure that the spectrum of authenticity areas corresponds to the spectrum of areas on which cultural values may be identified for heritage sites. That the four authenticities do not adequately cover the spectrum has been suggested in many recent conservation discussions. Enunciation of conservation practices in Japan suggest that the attributes worth attention in craftsmanship are not necessarily the 'substance and signs' of craft endeavour, but the techniques and traditions which produce such substance. Similarly, in the ICOMOS Vernacular Architecture Committee, efforts have focused attention on the need to preserve traditions — not substance alone — if such buildings are to retain meaning.

It would be premature to suggest what scope authenticity might better assume; but it is possible to emphasize the evident need to ensure the profession's use of these words reflects shared and explicit ideas about their intent and related limits.

Confusion over relativity of the authenticity concept

It is not unusual in conservation discussions to hear, 'his site is wholly authentic' or that 'his site entirely lacks authenticity'. It is difficult to accept either statement as fully plausible: can we envision sites so exceptional that their authenticity could not be put in question at least to some degree? Could there be sites so entirely false that they could not offer up some vestiges of integrity for the

ardent enthusiast? More to the point, the statements are not particularly *useful* since they don't assist conservationists to 'measure' authenticity at the moment an inscription is proposed for the World Heritage List, or at future intervals in monitoring the nature and direction of change within a site.

Authenticity must be understood as a relative notion. Measurement of authenticity is an attempt to establish the degree of authenticity possessed by a site — the degree of genuineness, the degree of realness, the degree of wholeness, the degree of completeness and so on.

Regional Reflections

Canadian conservation practice shares many concerns and issues with conservation activity around the world. At the same time, there are a number of concerns which arise more or less uniquely from our history and cultural circumstances. A number of examples follow.

Authenticity on native sites, e.g., Anthony Island

The abandoned Haida village of Ninstints sits in a protected bay on Anthony Island among Canada's west-coast Queen Charlotte Islands. At the time of European contact (1775), 6,000 Haida occupied several dozen villages throughout their island domain. Ninstints, intact and occupied early in the 19th century, had been abandoned by 1880, like all other Haida villages. By the middle of the 20th century, when serious scientific attention began to be directed to the site, all that remained were fragments of the wooden houses and wooden mortuary poles and house frontal poles. In 1981, the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The site poses a number of important authenticity questions. Does authenticity rest in the surviving wooden material (and therefore should treatment be directed to extending the life of the wooden elements to the greatest extent possible?) The question asked by George F. MacDonald in his book Ninstints, Haida World Heritage Site — 'will science save Nistints?' well illustrates the assumption made initially that conservation must focus on material authenticity. MacDonald goes on to note that:

although the totem pole rescue project of 1957... had virtually written off the remaining monuments as being too far deteriorated to warrant the effort of recovery, it now became crucial to re-assess the value of what was left at the site and to use scientific methods of analysis and preservation to save what remained. In the new perspective that followed UNESCO's decision that Ninstints was a site significant to the heritage of all mankind, every monument, no matter how ravaged by time and moisture, had to be assessed and to have its life prolonged as much as possible.⁵

But another view of authenticity is frequently broached. As the Haida themselves suggest, does authenticity lie in recognition of the traditions associated with cultural values of the site? Many Haida argue that the carved 'totem' poles were expected to decay and to be replaced frequently, as part of passing carving skills to each new generation of

craftsmen. Here, respect for cultural values appears firmly to suggest the need for understanding and reinforcing tradition. But those culturally-based arguments may have their own limitations. How does one assess their validity when those making them live in urban high rises and Haida living traditional lives cannot be found? What is authenticity then in practical terms for this site?

Authenticity on Main Street

The design approaches developed in the context of the decade old North American approaches to the revitalisation of the commercial cores of small-town American have also placed new demands on more conventional approaches to authenticity. While at the strategic level, the purpose of these programmes have been to increase community involvement in 'downtown' decision-making and to integrate conservation and development objectives and planning, they have also been very concerned with 'image'. A basic premise for these programmes (as developed and maintained by the American National Trust, Heritage Canada, and various state or provincial authorities has been that the major contributing factor in the definition of regional identities has been the character of the business districts of a region's towns.

The image of individual stores or store-fronts has been seen as a key factor in improving both civic pride and business effectiveness. The first efforts within these programmes to bring design order to the accumulated disorder of decades of the unplanned and cheap façade alterations which characterised these towns often involved design professionals who unwittingly reduced the design interest of such towns through 'tasteful' restorations or simplified interpretations of historic detail.

It soon became evident that entrusting a limited number of design professionals with the responsibility to bring about more-or-less overnight design improvement sanitised the qualities which had often attracted interest in the first place. 'Keeping it real' became the design watchword of Main Street; maintaining diversity through the involvement of as many individuals as possible in design decision-making was the goal; bad taste and the vulgar were not automatically excluded; modest design intervention, in context, became the preferred approach to improvement. And with time, many of the façades and store-fronts in the over 1000 North American communities that have participated in these programmes improved their ability to effectively communicate business images for owners while retaining in aggregate the diversity, the spontaneity, the freshness that had characterised them in earlier decades.

While no Canadian Main Street is on the World Heritage List, the tentative list includes settlements where consideration of appropriate treatment for the popular features of Main Street would pose these authenticity questions.

Authenticity in cultural landscapes

Much of the spirit of Canada resides in the distinct cultural landscapes which characterise, even symbolise the country's various regions. The country's image, legitimately

for many Canadians and visitors, is a mosaic compounded of the various organisational patterns give by man to the various landforms provided by nature. The flat wheat-growing lands of the western prairies are as distinct from the seigneurial strip farms of the French settlers in Quebec, running back from the river's edge, as they are from the farms of southern Ontario laid out over vast tracts of land in regular rectangular patterns by British military engineers.

Much of the country occupied by Canada's 'first nations' (or native peoples) is also characterised by sacred landscapes — essentially associational landscapes whose values lie in the meaning native traditions may impute to them.

While these various landscapes have been in use and evolving in Canada for a long time, the use of a cultural landscapes framework for conservation is as fresh in Canada as it is at the World Heritage level. The cultural criteria for review of cultural heritage nominations were modified in late 1992 by the Committee to permit cultural landscapes to be assessed more adequately than in the past. As a result, Canada has reviewed its tentative list and begun to consider submitting, among others, the Rideau Canal Corridor as a World Heritage cultural landscape — an early 19th century transportation corridor linking the Saint Lawrence River and the Ottawa River.

Clearly the application of the authenticity test to such sites brings new challenges. The Operational Guidelines define three categories of cultural landscape ('designed and created by man'; 'organically evolved landscape' with two sub-sets: 'relict (or fossil) landscape' or 'continuing landscapes'; and 'associated' cultural landscape). For the most part, as in the Rideau Canal Corridor, where both designed and continuing cultural landscapes units may be defined, their significant qualities are dynamic.

An examination of 'integrity' for rural landscapes examined by the National Park Service in the USA acknowledges the four familiar areas in the Committee's Operational Guidelines, but adds three others — location, feeling and association. The seven definitions used follow:

Design is the composition of natural and cultural elements comprising the form, plan, and spatial organisation of a property;

Setting is the physical environment within and surrounding a property;

Location is the place where the significant activities that shaped a property took place;

Materials within a rural property include the construction materials of buildings, outbuildings, roadways, fences and other structures;

Workmanship is exhibited in the ways people have fashioned their environment for functional and decorative purposes;

Feeling, although intangible, is evoked by the presence of physical characteristic that reflect the historic scene;

Association is the direct link between a property and the important events or persons that shaped it.7

Although these seven integrities — and here authenticity and integrity are being used in very similar fashion — move towards improving our ability to associate authenticity criteria with dynamic values, they may not take us far enough. As noted earlier with respect to vernacular architecture, there appears to be a need to articulate authenticity criteria rooted in respect for dynamic practices, here concerned with traditional land use.

Authenticity in Canadian 'historic sites'

Much of what North Americans are asked to believe about the past comes to them from the perspectives offered by government owned and managed historic sites. Over the course of this century, and inspired by the example of Colonial Williamsbury, the presentation of history on North American historic sites has acquired a flavour which distinguishes these efforts from similar efforts elsewhere. This flavour has much to do with the belief that the past could be recreated on these sites with something approaching reasonable accuracy. Canadians do not have Williamsburg (which is 50 percent reconstruction and 50 percent restoration to the chosen period of 1785) but they do have a Louisburg (which is a 1968 reconstruction of 20 percent of a French fortress town to its heyday in the 1740's) and many similar sites of lesser scale. The living history movement of the 1970s helped populate historic sites with role-playing actors, live farm animals, and other living reflections of historical reality in attempts to surround visitors with the real thing in all dimensions. The techniques involved have drawn from the research disciplines in their concern for historical accuracy but also from the entertainment ethic of Disneyland. A profession of 'interpreters' or guides, entrusted with the task of revealing meaning has grown up to support the presentation process. And, so great has the influence of the interpretation imperative been, that its needs, for the most part in a North American context, have driven conservation programmes. The outward form of historic sites has often reflected interpretive goals, and where those have given priority to entertainment or good story telling material, authenticity has often been sacrificed. In practice, this has meant until recently, a continuing bias for 'period restoration' to ensure a clear and consistent backdrop for interpretive activity.

A new generation of conservation professionals today are re-examining these approaches. Significant attention over the last five years had revealed the excesses of interpretive conservation activity on sites, and the degree of historic fabric forever sacrificed. Greater interest in transmitting the evidence of history to future generations without alteration has emerged. Interpreters, once focused on the goal of a wrap-around, all-encompassing theatrical reality, have realised that such perfection cannot be attained, and scaled back their initiatives; and conservationists and interpreters in a period of reduced public spending have discovered their common interests in revealing meaning and have begun to work more closely together.

The present authenticity challenge in the face of the new consciousness is producing two responses — a desire on the part of some to correct past mistakes and to rerestore on the basis of contemporary knowledge and

perspectives (which in my mind means ignoring the most important lesson of past conservation activity: the unattainability of full truth) — and those who more modestly (and correctly in my mind) have re-focused on our role as custodians. Their message is essentially to allow the sites to speak for themselves, as they are, and to explain to visitors the limits of truth in what they see. They are critical of the re-restorers, asking simply: the only thing we can be sure of is that future generations will know more than we do about these sites; what right do we have to compromise their enjoyment through application of our limited knowledge?

These two tendencies, of which I suspect the latter is increasingly in the ascendant, mirror the authenticity debates of the past - is it design forms that will allow authenticity to be maintained, or care for existing material fabric?

There are many more examples of Canadian contexts, some unique, some not, where other authenticity questions could also be profitably explored — with respect to 20th century architecture (the modern movement), with respect to heritage sites in the far north (extreme climates) for example.

Conclusion

1. Toward General Solutions

The concern of contemporary conservation practitioners to ensure that their judgements do not unconsciously impose cultural values on others is an increasingly important part of conservation dialogues. ICOMOS national committees such as that in Australia, particularly sensitive to these issues as a result of their own complex history, have recently begun to ask: 'Whose Cultural Values?' (this being the title of a large regional ICOMOS symposium held in November 1992, in Sydney). These concerns, as the Australian experiences demonstrate, do not just hold at the international level; indeed they may be equally relevant at the national level. They are certainly relevant in Canada; growing consciousness that our conception of two founding nations (both European) is too simplistic, that it entirely ignores both the cultural mosaic created by our recent immigration patterns and the native populations in place for thousands of years, has prompted a re-examination of our own conservation principles in a search for universality.

The new policy of Parks Canada formulated for managers of nationally-designated historic sites is nevertheless a good example of an approach which sets out to encompass universal principles. The policy is fairly straightforward; it provides (only) five principles — each reduced to a single word or phase: respect, value, understanding, integrity, and public benefit. Planning and intervention are meant to respect both the cultural values which give meaning to sites and their integrity in order to ensure benefit to future generations; such respect may only be achieved through efforts to ensure understanding of those values.

It is difficult to imagine cultural contexts anywhere within which these simple principles might be out of place: Where would decisions not demand respect for cultural values and integrity? Where would respect not be built through understanding? "Benefit" may be not quite as comfortable a fit as the others; here, it might be useful to suggest preference for use as a guiding principle, (through which benefit could be achieved, as desired.)

The focus of these principles on respect is critical and one element that significantly advances their utility beyond earlier models such as the Venice Charter. The conservation community is frequently critical of the Venice Charter for a number of reasons. It is sometimes said to be a European charter written for European contexts; it is sometimes described as a charter for stone buildings; it is sometimes described as a manifesto of the modern movement's approach to conservation. But perhaps, most importantly, the idea of respect for cultural values as a starting point for conservation decision-making is absent in explicit form. While it is implied in Article 9 which speaks of the need to 'preserve and reveal the authentic and historic value of the monument', its full implications are not explored or made clear.

Thus far, and wisely in my opinion, the conservation movement's professionals in ICOMOS have resisted efforts to change the Venice Charter. They have recognised the need for stability and shared approaches in doctrinal references as overriding that of accuracy or precision in content. This stability has allowed the conservation movement to gain a measure of philosophical credibility in jurisdictions around the world. As well, it is important to note that in practice the Venice Charter is rarely misapplied; conservation professionals do not use it as dogma; they do not use it in isolation, but rather speak of the 'body of doctrine' or 'internationally accepted principles' (referring to the Venice Charter and the constellation of national and thematic expressions like the Burra Charter and the Charter of Historic Towns which surround it); and they use the tenets of these various documents as starting points for debate.

What does all of this have to do with authenticity? Only to suggest that any effort to bring use and appreciation of the concept in line with the current demands of sensitive conservation practice will demand a major shift in the field's body of doctrine. This would not mean, I would hope, an abandonment of the Venice Charter and its supporting cast of characters - for they have served us well - but towards the development of a new document appropriate for the global realities and complexities of our own age.

This document will require a different ethical base, one which we might find difficult to articulate at present. The nature of this base may have been suggested in a comment made by Finnish ICOMOS member Maja Kairamo in public

discussion in Helsinki on October 25, 1993, in noting that 'we will write a new Venice Charter when we are ready to acknowledge the necessity of putting culture at the centre of development'. This is in some ways a put down of the growing affection for sustainable development approaches to everything from environmental planning to home cooking, where development remains central while laudable objectives of a less practical sort, (say cultural or social), remain as modest qualifiers. But it may also foretell a beginning orientation for that new ethic.

When we are ready to define that ethic, we may be able to catch up with the demands placed on our overworked and worn-out concepts of authenticity.

Framework for examination of authenticity issues.

This paper has raised a number of questions about the use of authenticity; definition, scope, and application, particularly to non-monumental manifestations of cultural heritage, have been examined. Answers in this area require debate among a wide spectrum of those affected by its implications, to ensure the conclusions will hold in a wide variety of contexts.

There are 3 main ways of organizing such debates. One is to concentrate on the theoretical issues.

- definition of authenticity: links to relevant doctrine; relation to cultural values of sites; form/substance issues;
- scope and formulation: the four authenticities (materials, design workmanship, place) or beyond? definitions of fields of application and implications.

A second way to organize debate is to explore the implications of authenticity consideration for each of the various types of cultural heritage sites, region by region. In my view, this approach is preferable, since it will encourage exploration of authenticity in the widest manner possible and generate discussion of the highest relevance to practitioners. This could be done by inviting contributions in various defined areas (e.g. authenticity and the vernacular; authenticity and cultural landscapes; authenticity and modern movement architecture; authenticity and archaeological reconstructions, etc.). Finally, results could synthesize application of case study lessons to the theoretical side in a search for universality built on practical demands.

A final way to organize such a meeting would be to develop agreement on a second generation of authenticity criteria to supplement and/or replace design, materials, workmanship and setting, and to organize papers to explore the implications of the test of authenticity in those areas.

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