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Title: Experiencing authenticity at heritage sites: some implications for heritage management and conservation

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EXPERIENCING AUTHENTICITY AT HERITAGE SITES: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

Abstract:

This article summarises the results from recent research focusing on the experience and negotiation of authenticity in relation to the historic environment. I argue that approaches to authenticity are still hampered by a prevailing dichotomy between materialist approaches (which see authenticity as inherent in the object) and constructivist approaches (which see it as a cultural construct). This dichotomy means that we have a relatively poor understanding of how people experience authenticity in practice at heritage sites and why they find the issue of authenticity so compelling. Drawing on ethnographic research in Scotland and Nova Scotia I show that the experience of authenticity is bound up with the network of tangible and intangible relationships that heritage objects invoke with past people and places. I argue that it is these inalienable relationships between objects, people and places that underpin the ineffable power of authenticity, and this also explains why people use ideas about authenticity as a means to negotiate their own place in the world. A summary of the main thesis developed out of this research is provided with short case examples. The article then highlights the implications for practices of heritage management and conservation.

Biographical note:

Siân Jones is a Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Manchester. She is author of *The Archaeology of Ethnicity* (Routledge 1997), *Early Medieval Sculptured Stone and the Production of Meaning, Value and Place* (Historic Scotland, 2004), and co-author of *A Fragmented Masterpiece: recovering the biography of the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish cross-slab* (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2008). Her recent work utilises ethnographic methods to explore issues surrounding conservation, authenticity, the social value of heritage, and the role of monuments in the production of memory, identity and place.

Introduction

Authenticity is a key concept informing the preservation, curation, management and presentation of the historic environment. Despite its importance, however, our understanding of authenticity is hampered by a dichotomy between what I will call materialist and constructivist approaches. In the former, authenticity is conceived as an objective and measurable attribute of artefacts and monuments, whereas in the latter it is seen as something which is subjective and culturally constructed. This dichotomy contributes to a problematic gap in our understanding of authenticity, because neither approach addresses its influence on how people relate to the historic environment. The relationship between the materiality of objects and their contexts on the one hand, and the experience and negotiation of authenticity on the other is often overlooked. Furthermore, the powerful, emotionally charged discourses that are invoked by the 'aura' of old things are themselves poorly understood. In what follows I summarise the results of research in Scotland (Jones 2010) and Nova Scotia (forthcoming) examining how people experience and negotiate authenticity and why it is an important element in the production of a sense of identity and place. I will then highlight the implications for policies and practices of heritage management and conservation.

The problem with authenticity

Authenticity can be defined as the quality of being authentic, truthful or genuine. In heritage conservation, authenticity has been associated with notions of the 'original' and the 'genuine' (Pye 2001, 58-9). The overwhelming emphasis until very recently has been on the integrity or 'true' nature of objects defined in relation to their origins, fabric, and the intentions of their makers (Clavir 2002, xxi). An authentic historical object or building is thus one that is true to its origins in terms of its date, its material, its form, its authorship, workmanship, construction, and, in many cases, its primary context and use. A complex battery of techniques and methods are marshalled to test for authenticity. Structure, material fabric and composition have been central to how conservators and material scientists approach authenticity (Pye 2001, 65). Various techniques are used to examine both the surface of materials and their internal structure and composition (Phillips 1997). This often involves testing against a 'control group' that has already been authenticated (Cleere 1995, 57-8). Another critical aspect involves distinguishing between the original materials and subsequent renovations, additions and revisions intentional or otherwise. With the traditional emphasis on originality, later additions have tended to be regarded as less authentic than the original, as have later repairs and revisions unless original techniques and materials were strictly adhered to (see Cleere 1995, 64).

Of course, the dynamic social lives of objects and monuments have been recognised in heritage management and conservation since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The Victorian Anti-Scrape movement led by Ruskin and Morris held that authenticity lies in the sequence of developments associated with buildings or monuments; a palimpsest that should not be tampered with except for essential repairs (Lowenthal 1995, 129; Stanley Price et al. 1996, 309-11). This informed a shift from extensive restoration, popular in the nineteenth century, to preservation as found. However, the *Venice Charter* of 1964, with its emphasis on authenticity in the sense of the 'genuine' or 'original' (Pye 2001, 58; Stovel 1995), reinforced a materialist approach to authenticity in heritage policy. Furthermore, UNESCO's *World Heritage Operational Guidelines* originally placed a strong emphasis on original material,

workmanship, and function, even though a palimpsest approach was adopted in relation to form and design (Cleere 1995).

It is only over the last two decades that such approaches have been seriously challenged by alternative perspectives, in particular indigenous and non-western approaches to heritage. The *Nara Conference on Authenticity* is regarded by many as a turning point (McBryde 1997). Many felt that the concept of authenticity underpinning the *World Heritage Convention* privileged Western, monumental forms of heritage, particularly those constructed with stone. The historical and cultural contingency of the concept of authenticity was emphasised (Jokilehto 1995; Lowenthal 1995), and non-western and indigenous case studies revealed a diverse range of cultural approaches to authenticity (von Droste and Bertilsson 1995; Mitchell 1995). The Japanese approach to completely dismantling and renovating wooden, Buddhist monuments, with the result that ultimately all the original materials are replaced, also challenged Western notions of authenticity and conservation. This led to a relativisation of the notion of authenticity in *The Nara Document*: ‘All judgements about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria’ (ICOMOS 1994, Article 11). Despite this, there is still a strong emphasis on universal value in the *Nara Proceedings*, and a concern with ‘the need for practical tools to measure the wholeness, the realness, the truthfulness of the site’ (Stovel 1995, 396). Furthermore, the *Nara Document* and the current UNESCO (2008) *World Heritage Operational Guidelines* retain a strong emphasis on form, design, materials, substance, use, function, tradition, and technique, even though intangible heritage, spirit and feeling have been added.

These trends in the heritage management sector reveal echoes of the arguments presented in the wider literature on authenticity over the last three decades. Much of this literature has been concerned with how authenticity is culturally constructed and thus relative. However, the implications of this are taken much further than in the *Nara Document* and other heritage charters. One of the main thrusts of this diverse literature is that authenticity is not inherent in objects, buildings, places, or indeed cultural practices. Rather, it is a quality that is culturally constructed and varies according to who is observing an object and in what context. Objects, and indeed non-material dimensions of culture, become embedded in regimes of meaning and exchange, such as those framing heritage conservation and management (Holtorf 2005; Phillips 1997), heritage tourism (Bruner 2005; Handler and Gable 1997), and the international art market (Errington 1988; Spooner 1986). Experts in various guises – connoisseurs, dealers, art historians, archaeologists, conservators and heritage managers – also actively produce and negotiate these regimes of value, thus mediating the authenticity of specific objects. Thus, in this light, the kinds of criteria outlined in UNESCO’s *Operational Guidelines* are regarded as the product of particular regimes of value which acquire the veneer of universality through the authority and power of the institutions that lend them credence.

A number of recent studies of authenticity have suggested that the character, prominence, and even the very concept of authenticity, are peculiar to the modern western world (e.g. Handler 1986; Lindholm 2008; Trilling 1972). In the Middle Ages, people held things to be authentic, because those with authority validated them as such, or because the things themselves demonstrated supernatural powers (Lowenthal 1995, 125-6). By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, authenticity came to mean something genuine as opposed to false or forged. It has been suggested that this is, in part, a reaction to the

increased social mobility, agricultural reform, industrialisation and urbanisation characterising the modern era. The extreme revision of previous modes of communal organization and the massive movement of people out of the countryside and into mixed urban environments, meant that ‘people were no longer quite sure where they belonged, what their futures held for them, or who their neighbours were’ (Lindholm 2008, 3). These are complex historical developments beyond the scope of this article. However, it does seem clear that a new inward-looking idea of authenticity emerged in the modern era that was linked to both social and physical dislocation on a grand scale, and the rise of scientific reasoning. The modern concept of authenticity became enmeshed with new ideas about the individual as an indivisible, fixed and bounded entity with a unique identity and internal essence; it ‘has to do with our true self, our individual existence, not as we might present it to others, but as it ‘really is’, apart from any roles we play’ (Handler 1986, 3). I want to suggest that objects also became conceived in such a way and, like persons, their individuality and internal essence became a focus of investigation. The materialist approach thus epitomises modernist notions of authenticity engaging with the very fabric of the object, establishing its origin and nature, looking beyond the surface to see what it ‘truly is’.

The problem is that neither the materialist nor the constructivist approaches explain the continuing power of authenticity in terms of how people *experience* the historic environment and in particular why some objects and sites are more powerful loci of authenticity than others. The materialist perspective, which sees authenticity as something inherent in the object to be measured in an objective fashion, is frequently divorced from the wider social and historical context of objects. Yet the deconstruction of authenticity does not take us very far in terms of understanding its powerful role in people’s social lives, nor why some objects are perceived as more authentic than others. Having situated it as a cultural construct, it seems as if layers of authenticity can be simply wrapped around *any* object irrespective of its unique history and materiality. In its most extreme forms the cultural constructivist approach seems intent on debunking a ‘risible’ and ‘futile’ quest for authenticity, as if having exposed it people will be less inclined to be duped (Lowenthal 1992). Recent research examining the relationship between objects, sites and places, and the production of emotions, identities and values, has shown that this is not the case (e.g. Bagnall 2003; Dicks 2000; Jones 2005, 2006; Macdonald 1997, 2002; Smith 2006). People work with objects and places to develop and strengthen social networks and relationships in meaningful ways. Thus, whilst constructivist analyses can be illuminating they often fail to adequately address people’s emotive and meaningful engagements with the historic environment, particularly in the sphere of authenticity. We need a means to understand and address the powerful, primordial discourses that are invoked by authenticity. We need to ask, why people find authenticity so compelling and what social practices it sustains?

Experiencing and negotiating authenticity

In a more detailed theoretical discussion (Jones 2010), I have argued that when we look at how people experience and negotiate authenticity, it is networks of relationships between objects, people, and places that appear to be central, not the things in and of themselves. Ruskin (1849, 233-34) alluded to the importance of such relationships when he talked about the deep sense of ‘voicefulness’, which we feel in relation to historic buildings that ‘have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity’. It is this that gives them substance and life, and which, for Ruskin, is destroyed by an excessive concern with origins and restoration. In his exploration of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin

(1969) also emphasises the importance of an object's unique history and relationships: 'The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to the history which it has experienced' (Benjamin 1969, 221). What is lost through mechanical reproduction, such as photography, is the unique existence in time and space of the original and all the relationships that entails. The uniqueness and authenticity of a work of art is thus inseparable from it being embedded in the fabric of tradition, which is thoroughly alive and changeable. This testimony to tradition, and the relationships it entails, constitutes an object's 'aura'.

When people experience a sense of the genuineness, truthfulness, or authenticity of objects it is something akin to aura or voicefulness that they articulate. It is the unique experience of an object, and crucially, I suggest, the web of relationships it invokes with past and present people and places, that is important (Jones 2010). Furthermore, direct experience of an historic object can achieve a form of magical communion through personal incorporation into that network. Thus the process of negotiating the authenticity of material things can also be a means of establishing the authenticity of the self. However, the effectiveness of this process depends upon people's ability to establish relationships with objects, and the networks of people and places these objects have been associated with during their unique cultural biographies. The materiality of objects is crucial here, as is some form of physical contact or intimate experience of them. This is not to do with their origins, material, form, or provenance, in a materialist sense, but rather because the materiality of objects embodies the past experiences and relationships that they have been part of and facilitates some kind of ineffable contact with those experiences and relationships. This leads to a powerful magical or enchanting quality, in that these past experiences and relationships appear to be carried along by the object in an almost contagious manner.

Macdonald's (1997, 2002) application of the concept of inalienable possessions to heritage objects is useful here. Inalienable possessions involve the paradox of keeping while giving, so that even while they enter into systems of social relations and exchange they are imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable qualities of previous owners. The authenticity of heritage objects is bound up with the intrinsic and ineffable qualities not just of past owners, but all of the past experiences, people, and places with which they have been connected. Thus, objects, such as a lock of Bonnie Prince Charlie's hair, or the nineteenth century Tea Clipper, Cutty Sark, have a unique and inalienable existence that is 'imbued with all the magic of having "been there"' (Macdonald 1997, 169). It is this inalienability, I suggest, which continually resists the modernist inclination to cut such relationships by locating authenticity in the material fabric and origins of objects. Dick's (2000) research focusing on Rhondda Heritage Park also highlights the significance of networks of relationships between objects, people and places in the experience of authenticity, and there are parallels that can be drawn between her research and the following case studies.

I want to briefly illustrate these arguments by turning now to my ethnographic research surrounding the 9th century AD Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab (see Jones 2004, 2010; and Figure 1). For those who engaged with the long-lost lower section of this monument during its excavation at the Hilton of Cadboll chapel site in 2001, the object seemed to possess a magical, almost numinous, aura, which was produced through their own and others' relationships with it (Jones 2010). For many who witnessed it being unearthed there was an ineffable sense of connection with the people who had erected it there and touched it in the past. People expressed a strong desire for physical contact, as if this would achieve some

magical communion with the past. This was particularly powerful for some local residents. As Duncan told me, ‘to know that my people were here and that stone is there just to touch it you know they must have seen it, they must have touched it you know going back these years, it was like something holy, I just needed to touch it’.¹

There was also a strong proclivity among local residents to see the cross-slab itself as a living thing; ‘an ancient member of the community’, something that, metaphorically, was ‘born’ and ‘grew’, and which has a ‘soul’. Through this they explored relationships of belonging and feelings of attachment which evoked powerful primordial sentiments. As Màiri, a woman in her 40s who was born and brought up in Hilton, put it, ‘you actually feel for it, you have a feeling for it. I can't put it any other way. It's part of your culture and therefore it's part of the people, its part of the community’. She went on to explain that ‘it's almost like being attached to rocks or the sea or it's always been here, it's [been] part of the place for generations’; elements that she had described as part of the birth of the earth earlier in the interview. Such discourses were a prominent aspect in negotiating the authenticity of the lower section at Hilton of Cadboll. They also provided a means for people to negotiate their own authenticity, through the depth of feeling they had for the stone, and the range of connections they could demonstrate to it through oral history and genealogy. Conceived metaphorically as an ancient member of the community, some people even located it in a network of putative kin relationships, thus providing a means for some people to negotiate more authoritative and authentic relationships to the object than others (see Jones 2005). In this respect, the experience of authenticity is not about its date, original setting, design, or material fabric in the sense of its geological make-up; it is about its ability to embody networks of relationships between people, objects and places. The location of the cross-slab is an inseparable aspect of its authenticity from such a perspective. If authenticity is negotiated through relationships between people, objects and places then removal to museums or any other form of relocation produces a problematic dislocation. Like boats and their relationship to the ocean, the feeling that such monuments were designed for specific places, and that continuity of setting is essential to their authenticity, is commonplace.

Another ethnographic research project reveals similar processes taking place at an open air living history museum, the Nova Scotia Highland Village Museum, which focuses on the experience of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia from the late 18th century onwards (see Jones forthcoming; and Figure 2). Standard approaches to material authenticity, focusing on the origins, historical validity, material integrity, and construction of buildings and objects, inform the curation and display of the Museum's collection. Furthermore, interpretation and animation of Gaelic culture is mediated by the desire to produce a credible representation of the past, which is typical of living history museums (Bruner 2007, 302). However, in my ethnographic research focusing on the experience and negotiation of authenticity in practice, it became clear that other characteristics and qualities are equally important. These concern how worn, aged, or new an object or building appears to be, and to what extent it manifests the experience of time and provides an encounter with the past. Again, touch is important in this respect; worn floor boards and banisters, for instance, providing people with some kind of ineffable, magical connection with the people who have inhabited buildings in the past (see Pye (ed.) 2008).

Forms of personification which provide a sense of the specific social lives of objects and buildings, and the people and places they have been associated with, are also fundamental to the experience of authenticity at the Museum. For instance the identity of the ‘Central

Chimney House', which was moved to the site in the 1970s and represents the typical vernacular housing of the Scottish immigrants of the early to mid 1800s, is bound up with the person who built it and the place it was associated with; Allan MacDonald of Stewartdale near Whycomagh. Indeed Museum interpreters² and other staff rarely refer to it by its functional title, preferring to call it the 'MacDonald House' to direct visitors to this personal history. Visitors in turn seek out this kind of personification of buildings and objects, asking interpreters about connections with past individuals and places. These practices highlight that the web of relationships between buildings, people and places is a more important aspect of their authenticity than their ability to represent specific forms of historic architecture. Personification creates an intimate relationship and a direct connection between the people who work in them and 'inhabit' them today and those who built and lived in them in the past. Furthermore, such experiences often stimulate similar narratives about buildings and objects connected to visitors' own family histories, cultural backgrounds and place attachments, as if negotiating authentic relationships for themselves (see Dicks 2000 for parallels).

Similar processes are at work in relation to the performance of intangible cultural heritage at the Museum, such as céilidhs and milling frolics.³ The authenticity of these Museum events is heavily mediated by an anthropologically informed conception of a dynamic, living, oral culture extending back to the eighteenth century Gaelic culture of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The social context of this oral culture is emphasised to visitors; as one member of staff put it, 'we don't use books, we just sing the songs and work on them and that way we pass them around between us'. Each song or story is attributed to particular 'tradition bearers' and/or particular places: 'I got this song from Alec Goldie', or 'this song setting is from around Boisdale, but there's another good setting from Inverness County'. Thus, songs and stories, through their making and transmission, forge relationships between people and places and this process is actively pursued during the events that take place at the Museum (see Jones forthcoming for more detailed discussion).

In both these cases, the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab and the Highland Village Museum, it is clear that people are engaged in the negotiation of a form of inalienable authenticity. Instead of focusing on the material authenticity or historical origins of buildings, objects, or cultural performances, their experience of authenticity relates to the networks of relationships between objects, buildings, songs, and so forth, and past people and places. It has been argued that the concept of 'belonging' and the desire to place people is an integral aspect of Gaelic culture (Macdonald 1997), and I would argue that this also extends to objects, songs and so forth. This culturally specific aspect of the cases I have discussed must be kept in mind, but comparable processes can be identified in many cultures and I suggest it is an important aspect of how people experience authenticity in the modern world. One of the reasons for this is the degree to which the modern era has been characterised by population displacement and fragmentation of communities. This has led to a materialist and rationalist approach to determining the authenticity of objects on the basis of their origins, material-make-up, form and function, in the sphere of heritage sciences. However, in practice, I argue, authenticity is bound up in more subtle process of working out genuine or truthful relationships between objects, people and places in the past and the present; relationships that have become fraught and ambiguous as a result of the dislocations produced by various economic and political forces during the modern era.

Implications

What then are the implications for heritage management and conservation? On the one hand, it is clear that whilst the experience of authenticity is linked to the materiality of heritage objects, it is not something which is restricted, in an intrinsic manner, to the object as a discrete thing. Instead it is associated with a magical quality or aura to do with the object's experience and its relationships with past people and places. On the other hand, looking at authenticity as a construct does not help us to understand these kinds of experiences and how they might be accommodated into heritage policy and practice. The research discussed here attempts to provide a fresh approach transcending this dichotomy. It suggests that:

1. Intangible qualities are very important in providing objects, buildings and places with an aura of authenticity. Intangible heritage is now a widely acknowledged category encapsulating language, religious beliefs, traditional cultural practices and oral traditions. Indeed it is the focus of the 2003 international *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Above and beyond this the subjective qualities associated with historic objects, buildings and places, such as atmosphere, spirituality, feeling and so forth, are also increasingly acknowledged in heritage policies and guidelines (e.g. *Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place*). However, there is a need to integrate these intangible and subjective qualities further in conservation practice, where they tend to be marginalised because other attributes, such as materials, substance, form and technique, lend themselves more readily to measurement using various tests and techniques. Indeed, this is acknowledged by UNESCO in its *Operational Guidelines*, which state that 'attributes such as spirit and feeling do not lend themselves easily to practical applications of the conditions of authenticity' (§ 83). Yet knowledge and understanding are now regarded as pre-requisites for the development of conservation and management plans, and I suggest that qualitative research methods could be employed much more widely to generate information and understanding about these attributes. These methods are increasingly used as a means to engage with indigenous source communities (Clavir 2002), but they are rare outside of this sphere when it comes to routine heritage conservation.
2. Material dimensions of buildings, objects and places are very important in terms of people's experience of authenticity. However, people's experience of the materiality of buildings, objects and places tends to relate to ineffable qualities, associated for instance with the patina of age and use (Holtorf and Schadla Hall 1999; Holtorf 2005), which are more in keeping with romantic and primordial discourses than a rationalist, scientific analysis. Certain forms of preservation and restoration can undermine these important qualities, which have been recognised at least since Riegl's (1903) seminal work on *The Modern Cult of Monuments*. However, in practice a concern with the preservation of historic value and material fabric tends to be privileged over such concerns with age value and aura. Given that the experience of authenticity is often more closely related to the latter than with the former, I suggest that it is time to take a step back and ask what we are preserving and why, if our intention is to maintain the authenticity of the historic environment. Should some objects and monuments be allowed to age and even 'die', if by arresting such processes we undermine their authenticity (see Holtorf 2005; Jones 2006; Walderhaug Saetersdal 2000, for wider discussion of this issue)?
3. Tangible and intangible connections between heritage objects, people and places are particularly important in the experience and negotiation of authenticity. These relationships range from a general ineffable feeling of connection with the past people and

places that objects have come into contact with, to quite specific known relationships embedded in the social lives of objects (past owners, occupants, users etc). The implication is that practices of conservation and display need to be sensitive to these networks of relationships and maintain them where possible. One important step would be to place greater emphasis on the social biographies of heritage objects, from their origins, to the present-day in terms of preservation, management and presentation/exhibition. There is no doubt that the experience, and thus conservation, of authenticity is enormously enhanced by the participation of concerned communities (source communities, local communities and so forth). Another important strategy is the maintenance of relationships with place, either physically, or conceptually. It is important to recognise that if these aspects of authenticity are ignored then we risk dislocating and undermining the very qualities and relationships that inform the authenticity of heritage objects as experienced by visitors, source communities, and other stakeholders (ibid.).

4. An important aspect of the experience and negotiation of authenticity is the degree to which people can *engage* with the network of relationships embodied by an object, building or place. I suggested above that direct experience of an historic object can achieve a form of magical communion, in a contagious sense, through personal incorporation into that network. The materiality of objects is crucial here, as is some form of physical contact or intimate experience of them. The importance of facilitating access and engagement has been stressed in recent heritage policy for a variety of reasons. There is also an increasing acceptance of the need for touch (Pye (ed.) 2008). However, in the conservation and management of many heritage objects and sites there is a tension between the physical preservation of sites/objects and the degree to which people are allowed to engage with them. In light of how important some form of intimate engagement or touch is for the experience of authenticity I suggest that we need to rethink how much emphasis we place on physical preservation, if in the process we undermine such aspects of authenticity.
5. Finally, my research with heritage professionals during the course of these projects suggests that they too value the qualities of heritage objects that have been discussed in this article. They are in fact involved in the creation of further networks of relationships between heritage objects, people and places. Yet they are often compelled by professional conventions and institutional constraints to right these aspects out of conservation policy and public display. I suggest that we need to do much more research with those who work with heritage objects in a professional capacity to understand the kinds of social networks and forms of authenticity that they are creating through the practices they engage in. This is particularly important in light of the diverse disciplinary backgrounds and forms of practise characterising heritage and conservation professionals, ranging from the hard sciences to the arts.

Conclusions

I began this article by highlighting a dichotomy between materialist and constructivist approaches to authenticity in the sphere of heritage. It would be wrong to suggest that there is some sort of hard and fast division between these two perspectives. A number of conservation policies and guidelines now allude to the difficulties of fixing criteria for authenticity, and the need for sensitivity regarding culturally diverse notions of authenticity. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence of a self-reflexive and relativist approach to authenticity in the

interpretation and presentation of heritage sites and objects. Yet in practice, we return to the problem that those involved in conservation desire practical tools to measure the wholeness, realness, and truthfulness of the material on which they work. This often leads in turn back to the traditional emphasis on material fabric and original form, function and use, if only because the techniques, methods and information sources in these spheres are often regarded as more 'objective' and authoritative. Constructivist critiques, in contrast, suggest that the very authority of particular techniques, methods and information sources derives from regimes of value that inform the cultural construction of authenticity. Moreover, for some, heritage institutions are intrinsically concerned with constructing the authenticity of objects, persons and collective social entities (e.g. Bennett 1995; Hetherington 1999); however much those working within them acknowledge that authenticity is culturally relative. Thus, an opposition between constructivist and materialist approaches does still prevail, even if it is manifested in a variety of ways and aligned in part with divisions between theory and practice.

I have suggested that the authenticity of objects is experienced and negotiated as a magical, almost numinous, quality, which is linked to the networks of relationships they have been involved in throughout their social lives. It is these relationships embodied by the cultural biographies of objects, buildings and places, from their origins to the present-day, which inform the experience of authenticity and its powerful impact on people's lives. Their aura or authenticity is a product of their ability to draw networks of past relationships along with them, or to put it another way, their ability to 'knot together' objects, people and places across time. As a result, authenticity is something that is actively put to use in recognising and negotiating networks of inalienable relationships between objects, people and places. Furthermore, I suggest that people use the experience of authenticity in relation to the historic environment to work out genuine or truthful relationships between objects, people and places for themselves, and this process is heightened by the dislocation and displacement that characterise the modern world.

Handler (1986, 4) argues that contact with heritage objects which have been authenticated by heritage institutions and museums 'allows us to appropriate their authenticity, incorporating that magical proof of existence into what we call our "personal experience"'. However, I suggest that this appropriation depends more on the ability of people to establish relationships with objects and the networks of people and places they embody through their unique cultural biographies, than it does on the sheer authority of museums and heritage institutions to authenticate objects. Authenticity is not simply a facet of the internal essence of discrete isolated entities as modernist discourses would have us believe, but rather *a product of the relationships between things*. This is why anxieties surrounding the authenticity of objects do not cease once it has been affirmed by heritage institutions, because there is always the question of whether the way we conserve and present them, might undermine or destroy their very authenticity by cutting them (and us) off from the unique networks of relationships they embody. I suggest that we need to address these anxieties about authenticity, and place the qualities and attributes that inform the experience of authenticity at the centre of heritage management and conservation practice. I have outlined a number of provisional implications based on my own research, but much more work needs to be done to ascertain how exactly heritage conservation and management might address these issues.

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Notes

¹ Names of interviewees are pseudonyms.

² The Highland Village Museum employs costumed interpreters (referred to as animators by the Museum) in most buildings who greet visitors in Gaelic and offer third person interpretation in English. Traditional craft activities are performed and there is some limited role-play.

³ Milling is a method of fulling newly woven cloth, shrinking the nap so that the cloth might be warmer when made into clothing or blankets. In Scotland it is known as waulking. A milling frolic is a social gathering involving a Gaelic song session where people sit around a table and beat the cloth in to the rhythm of the song.