

HERITAGE, IDENTITIES AND ROOTS: A CRITIQUE OF ARBORESCENT MODELS OF HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

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What is Heritage?

Heritage, etymologically, has been conceived of as an exchange relationship. Most definitions of heritage elaborate on its quality as a thing (or those things) which are passed on to future generations. The difficulty in quantifying these exchange relationships is that they are negotiated and mediated, often imperceptibly, over long periods of time.

A series of institutional charters, policy documents, legislation and national constitutions have developed a body of terms, policies and social behavioral precedents for the management of the costs and benefits of the heritage exchange relationship. Indeed, UNESCO has been taking steps towards the recognition of heritage as an inalienable human birthright (particularly in the case of genetic heritage and copyright law), relating to the dignity, identity and integrity of the person and the group within which the individual participates (see Kwak 2005). Although these steps should be applauded, some have also voiced concern over the ‘boom’ in heritage law, stating that we are living in an ‘age of heritage’, with ever more conservationist values creating an inexorable burden on those we wish to bequeath our heritage to (Cooke 2007a). Simply put, it is a question of sustainability.

Heritage is, however, not a *de facto* somatic phenomenon or social behavior. It is constituted by willful acts of choice (ICOMOS 2007: 1). The maintenance of heritage as a choice points towards beliefs in an image of time which has passed, that enriches and inspires a time which has yet to pass. Therein a value can be ascribed to the heritage relationship. This value can be best expressed as a constellation of negotiated and mediated sentiments – hopes, dreams, desires and beliefs.

A sentiment is a complex mixture of intellectual and emotional perceptions. Thus, heritage can be described not simply as a series of things to be managed, but also as a capricious coalescence of intellectual thought and emotional responses to the negotiation of our material and temporally understood experiences. The importance of this reorientation in heritage studies was articulated recently at the Capturing the Public Value of Heritage conference in London. Deborah Mattison (2006: 97) noted “experts ‘think’ and ‘know’, whereas people ‘feel’ and ‘believe’.”

Although Mattison's comment creates a false dichotomy between an unfeeling expert culture and an emotionally motivated public, the rhetorical call to highlight the significance of emotive responses for determining and articulating value in heritage is critical. Heritage does not simply exist. It is something we have to care *about* and simultaneously care *for*. Unfortunately the vast majority of heritage studies literature does not engage critically with how or why people "care" from an emotional, psychological or intellectual standpoint. That we "care" or "should care" is assumed. This assumption is often founded in the conflation of the concepts of heritage and identity.

Heritage and Identity

When it comes to defining heritage, the vast majority of people in Wicklow (71%) equate protecting Wicklow's heritage with "protecting our identity" and this is closely associated with "protecting our roots", with almost eight out of every ten people expressing pride in their heritage.

- Wicklow Heritage Awareness Survey (Wicklow County Council 2005)

In articulating the value of heritage in contemporary life, public surveys, such as the one quoted above from Co. Wicklow in Ireland, often stress is placed on the importance of heritage for "protecting our identity". In educational initiatives about world heritage, UNESCO (2007) also affirms this conflation, saying, "Understanding World Heritage can help us become more aware of our own roots, and of our cultural and social identity". Students and young people have arrived at the same conclusion:

Cultural and natural sites form the environment on which human beings depend psychologically, religiously, educationally and economically. Their destruction or even deterioration could be harmful to the survival of our identity, our nations and our planet. We have the responsibility to preserve these sites for future generations.

- World Heritage Pledge, World Heritage Youth Forum, Bergen, Norway
(UNESCO 2007)

These views are not limited to public opinions or institutional policies. Conflations between heritage and identity are also enshrined in legislature and national constitutions such as in the *Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of the Ireland)* (1937):

It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish Nation. ... Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage.

- Article 2, *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (1937)

Such a conceptual basis for asserting the value of heritage is advantageous to the heritage sector as it defends the sector's role as caretaker for an inalienable human right – identity. Operating within the structures of the state, the sanctity of individual and group identity creates both a civic responsibility and social entitlement to recognition of group identities. The vast majority of legislation and policy relating to heritage and identity are the result of discourses of national identity manifestation. Although nation-states provide a strong ideological defense of the heritage sector, their ideological foundation can also reduce the complexity of choices in the manifestation of heritage to “either/or” decisions relative to national consciousness and identity.

For example, in Ireland where immigration and economic development has dramatically changed the demographics of the state in recent years, debates over competing values between heritage and development concerns are often couched in reductive, romantic and essentialist language (see Russell 2007). A recent example of this has been the debate over the construction of the M3 motorway in the so-called Tara-Skryne valley in Co. Meath. In an article entitled “Is nothing sacred?” by Eileen Battersby in *The Irish Times*, the sacred, national qualities of the site of Tara and its landscapes were appealed to in order to support a preservationist position as a “national obligation”:

If Ireland has a heart, it beats here at Tara and throughout the dramatic hinterland that surrounds the complex, with its monuments, earthworks and cohesive record of settlement. (Battersby 2007)

Such a perspective is not only limited to nationalist ideologies. International opinion regarding the Tara debate has also highlighted the fundamentalist positions which the heritage sector can sometimes espouse. Prof. Dennis Harding (2004) of the University of Edinburgh stated in relation to the then-proposed M3 motorway that, “Carving a motorway through such a landscape is an act of cultural vandalism as flagrant as ripping a knife through a Rembrandt painting”.

Pat Cooke, Director of the MA course in Arts Management and Cultural Policy at University College Dublin, has argued that this vein of debate in the heritage sector has much to do with the historicity of the sector itself which sees itself as a universal given. In suggesting some points for critical reflection on heritage in Ireland, Cooke (Forthcoming) suggested that:

A place to begin might be to develop some sense of the historical nature of this heritage argument. One of the ironies of heritage is that its advocates fail to see the historicity of the thing itself; where history's stock is relativity, heritage deals in absolutes...

Adherence to a reductive, essentialist interpretation of heritage which is based on ethnic or national structures can result in an Orwellian struggle. A heritage sector based on intractable absolutes may lead more towards the fragmentation and ghettoisation of the heritage sector, with multiple identities competing for limited resources relying on arguments for *de facto* authenticity.

With increasing concern over civic apathy, heritage, when phrased as intrinsically linked to group identity, allows for the statutory recognition of a personal ideological stake in the manifestation of governance. This stake has dangerous potential as has been witnessed in the ethno-nationalist heritage and archaeological programs of European nation-states in the early 20th century (Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Galaty and Watkinson 2004). The Orwellian overtones of the state affirming civic stake through the sentiments of heritage and identity are well rehearsed (Díaz-Andreu and Champion 1996). Focusing solely on the politics of ethno-cultural entitlement to heritage such as citizenship based upon genetic inheritance (e.g. *jure sanguinis* in the Republic of Italy) can cause heritage to play an exclusive rather than inclusive role in the manifestation of civic co-presence and cooperation in the constitution of a state or community.

Rather than ownership, the language of trusteeship and stewardship should be preserved (Blaug *et al.* 2006). Heritage as civic cooperation and participation should be maintained as a forum for mediation, negotiation and compromise over competing values in the spirit of equal civic partnerships (ICOMOS 2007: 1). Perhaps what we are experiencing today is a convenient appropriation of heritage as an unquestionable ideology for the dictates of modern reactionary identity politics. Considering this, there is an opportunity for critical reflection on some of the fundamental conceptions of what heritage is.

Heritage and Group Identity

The link between heritage and identity has been expressed psychoanalytically by Vamik Volkan (2001; 2003) as “transgenerational transmission”. Through the passing on of shared identifications with stories, objects, symbols, performances and other aspects of heritage, one generation of a group can instill the values of the group’s identity in the subsequent members of a group. Younger members can then remediate and carry on the emotional responses through both positive and traumatic commemorations. For example, an “apology” issued by the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, (June 1, 1997) to Ireland for the “Great Famine” and the subsequent reactions in Irish society illustrated that such chosen narratives have residual potency in both Irish and British society as a result of transgenerational transmission (Holland 1997). In his statement, Blair noted:

[That] one million people should have died in what was then part of the richest, most powerful nation in the world is something that still causes pain as we reflect on it today... Those who governed in London at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy. We must not forget such a dreadful event. It is also right that we should pay tribute to the ways in which the Irish people have triumphed in the face of this catastrophe. (Irish Times Reporter 2007)

The transgenerational transmission of the trauma of the “Great Famine” is today commemorated worldwide not only as an aspect of heritage in Ireland but as world heritage, with farm cottages from rural Co. Mayo being transported as far as New York City as monuments (New York State Education Department 2002).

The power of the transgenerational transmission of experiences is that it can provide a historical lineage for the declaration of authentic identities. A conflation between authentic heritage and authentic identity can be used to create a stake for those who profess a specific identity and steward a specific heritage within a social power structure. Heritage and identity are not, however, things which simply exist as resources for the cohesion of communities. Founding heritage on such a psychological process can serve to exclude other manifestations of heritage through spontaneous inter-personal creation or discovery (e.g. archaeology).

Heritage and identity are not essences within any single person. They are manifested and performed through inter-personal relationships and behavior. They are phenomena which we actively and continually must choose to constitute (ICOMOS 2007: 1). Their constitution is in the form of agencies, perceptions, conceptions, mediations, performances and materializations. UNESCO classifies the phenomena of heritage into two types, tangible and intangible. Though there is a perceptual difference between the two categories (i.e. perception of permanence and tangibility), tangible things (i.e. buildings and sites) are only materialized as heritage through human agency, choice and will (see Russell 2006). Thus, the underlying quality of heritage is as a set of inter-personal relationships.

Considering the above argument, justifying either heritage or identity through the deployment of the other is a tautology. Both are mutually enmeshed phenomena of human inter-personal and group psychological dynamics. Neither is *a priori*. It is through the shared willful act and choice of humans to participate in negotiation and mediation of shared self and group images and in compromising over competing valuations of roles and terms of encountering the world that the co-creation of both heritage and identity as phenomena can be constituted. To abbreviate, both heritage and identity are the constellation of sentiments within the becoming of modern groups.

Undercutting the Roots of Heritage and Identity: Trees, Rhizomes and Mycelia

Heritage is traditionally understood as a linear exchange relationship between two parties where there is a passing on of the role of trustee. Although the growing global market of heritage has increased the complexity of this web of networked relationships, the core concept is of preservation and sustainability of lineages – paths upon which things are passed to future generations. Fixing identity as a main determiner of heritage authenticity and value is part of a modernist Western arborescent paradigm (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). The arborescent paradigm pictures knowledge in the structure of a tree, where there is linear growth and progress (e.g. time) and binary relations (e.g. inside and outside) and dualistic modes of thought (e.g. self and other).

Picturing arborescent heritage, the roots ground the structure of the relationships in the matter, ideas and images of the past, and the structure grows upward into complex hierarchies of social relation deriving their inheritance from the roots. Hierarchies of both temporal age and social position allow for power dynamics and competitions over

authenticity of agency. Although the rationale of pluralism might lead us to plant many different trees, this would only effect a proliferation of rationalized hierarchical systems of control, entitlement and power which reify the Western linear temporal paradigm. Despite the pragmatic usefulness of linear and arborescent models for power hierarchies in governance, the recent theoretical pressure to move away from modern bifurcations of self and other (us/them) suggest that new models for understanding the sentiment of heritage should be considered.

An alternative to the arborescent model was described by Carl Jung and developed upon by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) – the rhizome.

Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. The part that appears above the ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away—an ephemeral apparition. When we think of the unending growth and decay of life and civilizations, we cannot escape the impression of absolute nullity. Yet I have never lost the sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains. (Jung 1962: Prologue)

In Jung's metaphor the rhizome (e.g. ginger root) is a capricious, undulating coalescence of existential possibility from which our perceptible phenomena emanate and return. The Jungian rhizome allows us to leave behind linear logic and arborescent knowledge structures and instead suggest that heritage is a rhizomatic constellation of sentiments.

Turning towards heritage and identity, a different image may be more apt. In conversations with Andrew Cochrane, the metaphor of mycelia has been developed. In mycology (the study of fungi), the mycelium operates very similarly to the rhizome. It is more complex though since the fruit which appears on the surface (the mushroom) as distinct and separate is still part of a collective mycelium – the network of white filaments that make up the vegetative part of a fungus. Relating to heritage, it is an apt metaphor as the fruits of the system feed directly on decaying matter to grow.

For heritage and identity, sentiments emanate from the mycelia of social and inter-personal relations. Thus, the roots of heritage or identity are not in the things or materials of the past but rather are in the mycelial qualities of human phenomenological perception mediated through inter-personal relations. Thus, if we would wish to preserve heritage as an opportunity for dialectical mediation of perceptions of being and thinking, it is the opportunity for free social interaction and open mediation that should be preserved. It is not enough to simply preserve the dwelling places of humanity. This is only one part of the preservation of the opportunity to dwell and the multiple possibilities for dwelling. To simply preserve the buildings or structures or sites defined as tangible heritage (though this is a necessary and pragmatic endeavor) only stewards the symptoms (branches, blossoms or fungi) of heritage and identity.

In this model, we are not called to preserve or celebrate any singular phenomenon (branch, blossom or fungus) as heritage but rather to nurture, steward and cultivate the

mycelium as space for negotiation and mediation in which heritage phenomena fruit. This removes the strain of the binary logic of the preservationist discourse in heritage – to preserve or to destroy – and allows for multiple possibilities for remediation of heritage. Even through the decaying of one conception of heritage, a new heritage could grow.

Cultivating Mycelial Sentiments

A policy structure which addresses the mycelial qualities of heritage and identity begins with an appreciation of emotions, sentiments and psychological qualities of human responses to contemporary experience. Thus, policy can seek not only to save things from oblivion but also to encourage the preservation and development of sentiment (caring about the past) by creating and stewarding open spaces for negotiation and mediation of heritage (ICOMOS 2007: 1).

Acknowledgement of the importance of such open and diverse spaces has been noted publicly. The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) stated:

Cultural heritage diversity exists in time and space, and demands respect for other cultures and all aspects of their belief systems. In cases where cultural values appear to be in conflict, respect for cultural diversity demands acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties. (Nara Conference on Authenticity 1994)

The Nara Document also stated that the underlying quality for the determining of value was “authenticity”. Authenticity was defined as:

the knowledge and understanding of ... sources of information, in relation to original and subsequent characteristics of the cultural heritage, and their meaning

Though a sound practicable basis for constructing a management system for evaluating competing claims, authenticity understood purely as data constructs a hierarchy of values, where some heritage claims are less authentic than others. Authenticity should be located not in data and information alone but in human sentiment and choice. Such an understanding of authenticity is based on consensus, on human choice to come together and profess an identity or celebrate a heritage. There are no social relationships which can be said to be more authentic than the next. It follows then that there are no identities or heritage which are more authentic than others. All are deserving of equal recognition and protection as acts of human will and choice (ICOMOS 2007: 1).

This is the most essential and precious resource we have – that we care about who we are and how we express both who we were and where we wish to go. Who is to say that humanity will always care about the past, heritage or identity? Is it enough to simply preserve the things of the past? Or is it equally important to preserve desire and opportunity for emotional responses to the past?

Some Limitations of Arborescent Identity for Heritage

There is currently a strain put on limited resources for preservation and conservation in some parts of the world. In an arborescent model of authenticity, it is difficult to articulate an acceptable method of deacquisitioning previously deemed authentic items worthy to be preserved. Mycelial heritage allows for a more open acceptance of the possibility of deacquisitioning collections and sites and demobilizing certain aspects of the heritage sector if it is deemed to be appropriate through consensus. The current arborescent analytical framework for heritage based on modern identity results in a sector which responds more to modernist structures of knowledge than to manifested human choice and consensus. Reducing heritage to a product whose authenticity is verifiable only through quantifiable scientific research reduces the emotive desires of humans for recognition, identity and cultural expression to a tautological proof for modern ethno-national state systems. Such an unquestioned arborescent tautology of heritage preservation is potentially unsustainable and could prove to become a burden rather than a benefit for future generations (see Cooke 2007a).

A recent challenge to the arborescent understanding of heritage based on identity is the acknowledgement of digital heritage and digital life-worlds. In 2003 UNESCO (2003) adopted a Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage, stating:

The digital heritage consists of unique resources of human knowledge and expression. ... Where resources are “born digital”, there is no other format but the digital object.

As an open space, digital life-worlds (especially open-source programming) are founded on the acceptance of anarchic expression of self and group. Knowledge bases such as wiki’s rely upon participation, will and choice to generate consensus on authenticity. The chosen authentic resources do not, however, supercede the awareness or acknowledgement of other resources. All are equally accessible. In such a digital age, an arborescent conception of identity as a basis for the preservation of digital heritage is untenable as its epistemological foundation runs counter to that of the form of human digital expression.

Cultivating the Mycelia of Heritage

In an arborescent model of identity and heritage that creates a power structure of entitlement, often the identities and heritage which are celebrated are overly positive. What of the darker side of humanity? In the process of development and social recognition, identities can become sanitized and justified through the commemoration of positive actions of a group. Volkan’s (2001; 2003) research reminds us of the importance of the transgenerational transmission of experiences of traumatic events in the formation of group identities. Though these events are often perpetrated by a conceived “other”. Dino Domic’s (2000) research on the role of heritage and identity in post-war Croatia has

illustrated that there are complex group psychological dynamics which respond to traumatic events. These responses can turn towards nostalgia or idyllic mythologies to sanitize a group's identity and manifest a positive reflection of a group's identity in their heritage. Domic's research reminds us that heritage should not be seen as something which is essentially a reflection of good reified by the projection of evil. A mycelial conception of heritage undercuts such dualistic thought and allows for a myriad of heritage experiences which celebrate and commemorate human choice in all its manifestations however it is subsequently valorized.

Turning towards a language which seeks to preserve the mycelial emotive basis for human choice to participate in heritage can allow for productive reconceptualizations of heritage projects. The research of Jenny Blain and Robert Wallis (2006) on the enhancement of heritage projects through the inclusion of contemporary heathen spiritual groups in the management of such sites as Sutton Hoo in the United Kingdom has illustrated that an embracement of human desire rather than an enforcement of scientifically founded conceptions of authentic heritage can produce dynamic and positive social projects where new stakeholders and stewards can be found in previously excluded communities.

To return to the Tara/M3 controversy in Ireland, a mycelial conception of heritage would help alleviate anxieties about the complete loss of heritage through change and development of the Tara landscape. Though the building of the motorway has resulted in the destruction of some archaeological sites and has altered portions of the landscape, these acts in themselves create energy for new conceptions of heritage to be produced. The mycelium of heritage in Co. Meath or in Ireland can not be destroyed by a single motorway, and the more debate and sentiment created through such action as laying a motorway only nurtures the mycelium of sentiment and debate – encouraging a richer fruiting of heritage.

Heritage and Identity: The Future

Identity as a core aspect of human psychological behavior will not cease to be a useful concept in discussing heritage policy. It offers a way of recognizing and including diverse voices in the manifestation of heritage. It facilitates bringing new stakeholders into the management of social, cultural and environmental resources. The limitation of identity is, however, its basis in arborescent models of human knowledge. These arborescent models facilitate power structures and exchange relationships which can seek to reify contemporary ethno-national entitlements and market economics. As boundaries between identities blur and a capricious array of identities manifest themselves in a globalizing world, a language of inclusiveness through civic agency and choice should become the basis for determining values and strategies for stewarding heritage. It is suggested that mycelial understandings of identity and heritage will help follow Ricardo Blaug, Louise Horner and Rohit Lekhi's (2006) call to provoke the sector to refine its construction of valuation procedures in the development of a more democratic conception of heritage value. Rather than exploring heritage management as choices of either/or, heritage as mycelia allows for both/and.

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