

An Introduction to Authenticity in Preservation

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The meaning of authenticity continues to be debated decades after the drafting of the Venice Charter and the World Heritage Convention.

The very first paragraph of the preamble to the Venice Charter (1964), in reference to historic monuments, says, “It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity.”¹ So what is authenticity? And why do we care?

In 1972 UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention, and five years later the World Heritage Committee defined criteria for inscription of properties on the World Heritage List.² The World Heritage Convention’s Operational Guidelines originally stated that in order to be designated, cultural properties must “meet the test of authenticity in design, materials, workmanship, and setting.”³ More recently the attributes of authenticity have been expanded to include use, function, traditions, language, spirit, and feeling.

The Venice Charter states that for culturally significant monuments reconstruction (rebuilding using mostly new

materials or restoration that is based on conjecture) is not permissible and that only anastylosis (the reassembly of the dismembered original parts) can be permitted (Fig. 1).⁴ Furthermore, the Venice Charter notes that new interventions should occur only when absolutely necessary and that the new materials used in preserving a historic structure should be distinguishable from the original construction (Fig. 2).⁵ What is additionally implied is that the acquired layers of history forming a palimpsest have value and are the object to be considered: the corollary belief is that there may be a certain loss of authenticity when the lacunae of missing parts are filled in to produce a coherent unified interpretation of a structure.⁶ But what about Warsaw, then, reconstructed after its World War II destruction and inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1980? It has been described as possessing “authenticity in relation to its tem-



Fig. 1. The ongoing restoration of the Parthenon follows the Venice Charter and is a prime example of anastylosis. All photographs by the author unless otherwise noted.



Fig. 2. Dutchmen inserted at the Propylaea, one of the monuments of the Athenian Acropolis, follow the exact geometry of the voids but are carved to the original exterior profile of the stonework, rather than the existing weathered profile. By this means the new material, although from the same marble quarry, is easily distinguishable from the original.



Fig. 3. The Fantoft Stave Church is a 1995 reconstruction erected after the original church was burned to the ground by Satanists. The original church, dating to 1150, was relocated from Fortun, Norway, to Bergen in 1882, bringing into question authenticity of setting.

poral context.”⁷ And does the Fantoft Stave Church — constructed around 1150 in Fortun, Norway, relocated to Bergen in 1882, and reconstructed in 1995 after it was burnt to the ground three years earlier by Satanists — not evoke authenticity of memory (Figs. 3 and 4)? Think also of the bridge at Mostar in Bosnia.⁸ Do these reconstructions not represent the ultimate act of bravery, the revival of the spirit of place?

One difficulty with the Venice Charter and, by extension, the early versions of the Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Convention has been the identification of cultural heritage as monumental architecture, a Western construct. But in the post-modern era of preservation, the anthropological view of cultural heritage has gradually superseded that of the monumental.⁹ This shift substantially broadened the definition of cultural heritage to incorporate a wide range of tangible and intangible expressions of authenticity.

Recognizing the challenge of defining authenticity, the Government of Japan and ICOMOS, working with the World Heritage Committee, sponsored a conference.¹⁰ A preparatory workshop was held in Norway early in 1994, and then later during the same year, the confer-



Fig. 4. An extraordinary level of detail was replicated in the reconstruction of the Fantoft Stave Church, as seen in this pew end. However, the overwhelming smell of new wood in the interior belies the reconstruction.

ence took place in Nara, Japan. The resulting Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) addressed various views of authenticity within different cultures.¹¹ Japan was keen on revisiting the definition of authenticity because of its timber buildings. In Japan maintaining significant wooden temples involves periodically dismantling them to replace deteriorated fabric and then rebuilding using the original construction technology. This practice dates back centuries. Is this not then authenticity of tradition? Should that continuity not be recognized as truly remarkable and of outstanding universal value (OUV)?¹² Is authenticity not also a cultural construct?

At Nara the concept of “progressive authenticities” — recognizing the legitimacy of layered authenticity, evoking successive adaptations of historic places over time — was reaffirmed.¹³ Authenticity of tradition — a type of intangible heritage — was recognized as having value. The need for flexibility when defining authenticity was recommended.¹⁴ As David Lowenthal writes in one of the Nara conference papers, “Authenticity is in practice never absolute, always relative.”¹⁵ Subsequently ICOMOS encouraged regional meetings to explore the context of authenticity in their respec-

tive cultural domains. Among the fifty regional and national meetings on that topic held since 1994, the Inter-American meeting convened in San Antonio, Texas, resulted in the Declaration of San Antonio (1996), acknowledging the multi-cultural identity of the Americas and acceding that “authenticity is a concept much larger than material integrity.”¹⁶

The recognition of cultural landscapes under the World Heritage Convention has also raised new questions on authenticity. As in historic cities, the ongoing dynamic processes involved in places of living heritage challenge some of the traditional definitions and criteria for authenticity.

The properties on the World Heritage List are unevenly distributed internationally, with the overwhelming majority of sites located in Europe or constructed following European traditions. At the request of the World Heritage Committee, ICOMOS researched this imbalance and subsequently published a report entitled “The World Heritage List, Filling the Gaps – An Action Plan for the Future.”¹⁷ What is clear from this investigation is that many of the gaps are in the geographical locations where construction materials are ephemeral and less permanent.

In practice, authenticity has a significant effect on our choices of conservation interventions. The following two case studies are from the office of WASA/Studio A (also known as Wank Adams Slavin Associates LLP), wherein I am the partner in charge of the Preservation Group.

In 2003 WASA completed the restoration of the Hunterfly Road Houses of Weeksville. This group of four vernacular, wood-frame, clapboard cottages represents the only standing remnant of one of the first free African-American communities in Brooklyn, New York. After much research (archival, archaeological, physical documentation, materials analyses, and oral histories), the buildings have been restored and are being interpreted as house museums of African-American history (Fig. 5).

Initially discovered in the mid-1960s by a history professor from Pratt University, one of the four houses was lost to arson before the buildings could be



Fig. 5. The Hunterfly Road Houses of Weeksville represent the only surviving remnant of one of the first free African-American communities in Brooklyn, N.Y. They have been restored as a timeline (from left to right: 1960s, 1870s, 1900s, and 1930s) and interpreted as house museums of African-American history. The building at the far left is the reconstruction. The 1930s garage at 1698 Bergen Street is the masonry structure to the far right of the photograph. Photograph courtesy of Stephen Barker.

restored. It was reconstructed in the early 1980s as part of the restoration of the houses at that time. The reconstruction, however, replicated only the exterior; the interior was left as an open space to be used as a classroom, with the location of original partitions outlined on the floor. In this instance, the reconstruction is totally honest on the interior because it does not attempt to deceive through conjectural interior rebuilding.

The work of the early 1980s had restored the buildings to 1883, the first time the structures are shown on insurance maps.¹⁸ In doing so, additions appearing in a 1904 photograph — including a porch, shed, enclosed vestibule, dog house, and summer house — were removed because they did not conform to the period of restoration. This approach was fairly typical of U.S. preservation theory at that time.

Approximately 20 years later, the buildings needed restoration again. By this time notions of authenticity had changed, affecting concepts of period restorations. After analyzing the goals of interpretation with the stewards and stakeholders, WASA/Studio A designed the restoration as a timeline: significant elements deserved to be highlighted from different periods, which could tell important stories and enrich the historical narrative. For instance a 1930s garage was still part of one of the buildings, 1698 Bergen Street (Fig. 5). An African-American family that was affluent enough to own a car and build a

garage had purchased this house (as opposed to leasing it). The interior of the house still maintained the integrity of the remodeling the family had undertaken in the 1930s as well, and there were numerous photo albums from the family's private collection that were made available for the restoration (Fig. 6). The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission agreed with the project's approach. Consequently the buildings were restored as a timeline representing the 1870s, 1900s, 1930s, and 1960s (the latter referring to the rediscovery of the site, civil rights movement, and reconstruction). In doing so it was necessary to replicate many of the elements that had been removed in the previous restoration (Fig. 7). Thus, this project demonstrates changing attitudes towards authenticity within a 20-year period.

The other case study involves the restoration of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, located on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Completed in 1959 this iconic, Frank Lloyd Wright–designed building is recognized internationally as an exceptional example of the Modern Movement (Fig. 8). The current work included the removal of up to 11 layers of paint in order to expose, assess, and repair the original gunite, concrete, and cement stucco substrates.

Paint analysis was performed on more than 100 samples. The analysis revealed that the original paint color corresponded to Benjamin Moore HC-35, a buff yellow or light brown.¹⁹ From

archival correspondence, this color appears to have remained on the building for about five years; the first repainting was a darker buff color, perhaps matching the soiled appearance of the original color. An addition, designed by Wright's son-in-law Wesley Peters, was erected in 1968, at which time it seems likely the building was repainted. In 1975 another alteration, designed by Donald Freed, enclosed the original driveway between East Eighty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, creating the gift shop, during which time the Guggenheim was probably repainted again.

By the time it became a New York City–designated landmark in 1990, the building had undergone at least four repainting campaigns. Paint analysis showed that a series of warm-colored paints had been applied over the original buff. These colors gradually changed over time: the first repainting was the darkest color, then the lightest, then the pinkest, and finally the most yellow.

In 1992 most of the Wesley Peters addition was demolished, and an addition designed by Gwathmey Siegel and Associates erected in its place (Fig. 9). This alteration is arguably the most significant in terms of impact on the aesthetics of the original building (it was, however, described by noted *New York Times* architectural critic Paul Goldberger as a respectful backdrop that improved the Guggenheim as a museum as well as a piece of architecture).²⁰ With the completion of the addition, which is clad with limestone, the



Fig. 6. The interiors of 1698 Bergen Street retained the decorative integrity of a 1930s remodeling, when it was owned and occupied by an African-American family, and have been restored to that period. Photograph courtesy of Stephen Barker.

building was painted with a color corresponding to Benjamin Moore 1541, a coolish grayish white.²¹ The original buff yellow color had faded from collective memory and off-white became the public perception of the building. In 2003 it was repainted with a similarly low-chroma color, a little lighter than 1541.

The debate about what color the Guggenheim should be repainted as part of the ongoing restoration split the preservation community into two distinct camps. On the one hand, there are the preservation purists who believe that now is the opportunity to reinstate the original color chosen by Frank Lloyd Wright. (Recent articles have mistakenly stated that Wright, who died in 1959, did not see the exterior of the building completed.²² While it is true that he did not live to see the museum opened to the public, the exterior was actually painted in the fall of 1958. There is archival information and a historic photograph in the museum's archives of Wright standing next to the building with a backdrop of workers on a hanging scaffold in the process of painting the Guggenheim.)

On the other hand, the position of the museum, supported by WASA/Studio A, is that of progressive authenticity. The Guggenheim is a living entity that has evolved over time, and the building is the manifestation of that history. The

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commissioners have recently voted for a color that is not Wright's buff. Charles Gwathmey, who had designed the 1992 addition, had thought (incorrectly) that the color chosen for the addition was close to the original color of the Wright building. However, is it not possible that if Gwathmey had known the original color was a yellowish buff, the exterior finishes selected for his addition may have been very different? Our position, then, is that we can accomplish a period restoration only to 1992; since we are not removing the alterations and additions to the building over time, it seems inconsistent to go back to the 1958 color. However, both this approach and the purist viewpoint are equally valid interpretations of authenticity.

So what is authenticity? Is it authenticity of materials and/or craftsmanship? Design? Setting or landscape? Spirit and sense of place? Use or adaptive reuse? Integrity? Memory? Public perception? The *APT Bulletin* dedicates this special issue to this topic. A working group consisting of Christina Cameron, Nora Mitchell, Herb Stovel, and myself was formed to debate the topic, and a group of selected authors was asked to submit papers responding to the following concepts:

Importance of authenticity. Why is authenticity important for heritage

conservation? Why do we spend so much time worrying about this concept? How does it help us — or hinder us — in conservation work?

Definition of authenticity. What do we mean by *authenticity*? How can we define it in ways useful for application in conservation decision-making? How do we distinguish it from other similar concepts such as *integrity*?

Application of authenticity. How do we use authenticity in practical ways? How does use vary in different contexts? With cultural landscapes? With historic cities? With historic buildings? With archaeological sites? What have the interpretations of authenticity used in the World Heritage contexts added to use of the concept? What have the various regional meetings added to this? How do we measure and evaluate authenticity?

It is our aim to address these questions and foster further discussion on authenticity in preservation. We hope these papers are useful in progressing dialogue about this crucial concept.

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Fig. 7. Later additions to 1698 Bergen Street, such as this porch, which had been removed during the 1980s restoration in order to conform to an 1883 period restoration, were replicated in the recent restoration. Photograph courtesy of Stephen Barker.

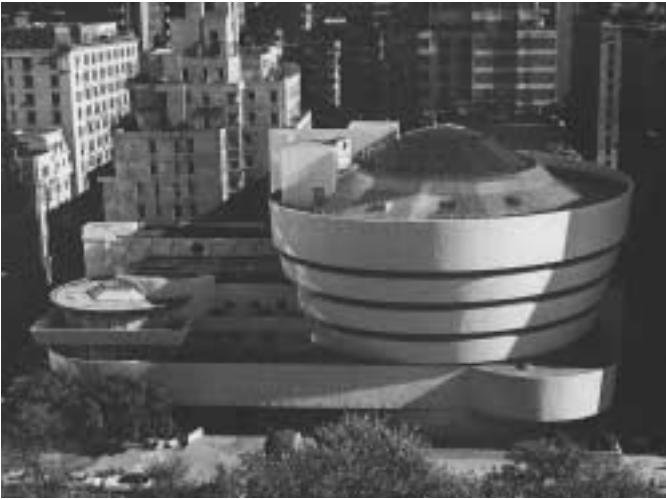


Fig. 8. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and seen here with the Wesley Peters addition post-1968, is an internationally recognized icon of the Modern Movement. Photograph © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. All rights reserved.



Fig. 9. The Guggenheim Museum with the 1992 Gwathmey Siegel addition behind it. The addition is arguably the most significant alteration to the aesthetics of the original building. Photograph by Angel Ayón.

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Notes

1. The Venice Charter: International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (1964), preamble.
2. The full name of the international treaty is the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and it was adopted by UNESCO in 1972. International concern for global heritage was vocalized over the ancient Egyptian Abu Simbel temples, which were to be flooded as a result of the construction of the Aswan High Dam. In 1959 at the request of both Egypt and Sudan, UNESCO became involved in a campaign to safeguard the temples. Around 50 countries donated funds for their preservation. After several other successful international safeguarding campaigns, a conference convened by the White House in 1965 proposed a World Heritage Trust to protect natural and cultural sites of global importance. By 1968 IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) also proposed a similar concept. UNESCO with ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and IUCN drafted the convention for the safeguarding of cultural and natural sites that are internationally recognized by inscription on the World Heritage List. See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/169/>.
3. Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Convention (1977), Article 24b.i.
4. The Venice Charter, Article 15. The Venice Charter was drafted by the Second International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, which met in Venice in 1964 (the first congress drafted the Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments of 1931). It was adopted by ICOMOS in 1965. The purpose of both the Athens Charter and the Venice Charter was to adopt acceptable international standards for the treatment of cultural properties.
5. The Venice Charter, Articles 9, 12, and 15.
6. Paul Philippot, "Historic Preservation: Philosophy, Criteria, Guidelines," in *Preservation and Conservation: Principles and Practices, Proceedings of the North American International Regional Conference, Williamsburg, Va., 1972* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1976), 378.
7. Jukka Jukilehto, "Session 1. Session Report," in *Nara Conference on Authenticity, Japan 1994, Proceedings*, ed. Knut Einar Larsen, (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre; Tokyo: Agency for Cultural Affairs; Rome: ICCROM, Paris: ICOMOS, 1994), 70.
8. Refer to Christina Cameron's paper in this issue, "From Warsaw to Mostar: The World Heritage Committee and Authenticity."
9. B. von Droste and U. Bertilsson, "Authenticity and World Heritage," in *Nara Conference on Authenticity*, 6.
10. ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, is one of three statutory advisory bodies to the World Heritage Convention.
11. "Nara Document on Authenticity," in *Nara Conference on Authenticity*, xxi–xxiii. See www.international.icomos.org/charters/nara_e.htm.
12. *Outstanding universal value* is the term the World Heritage Convention uses in its definitions under Articles 1 and 2 to describe the global significance of monuments, groups of buildings, sites, natural features, geological and physiographical formations, and natural sites that are inscribed on the World Heritage List. See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>. See also Henry Cleere, "Concept of 'outstanding universal value' in the World Heritage Convention," *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 1, no. 4 (1996): 227–233.
13. Von Droste and Bertilsson, 4.
14. Nobuo Ito, "'Authenticity' Inherent in Cultural Heritage in Asia and Japan," in *Nara Conference on Authenticity*, 44.
15. David Lowenthal, "Changing Criteria of Authenticity," in *Nara Conference on Authenticity*, 123.
16. *Proceedings of the Interamerican Symposium on Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage of the Americas. San Antonio, Texas, March 1996* (Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.: Getty Conservation Institute and US/ICOMOS, 1999), ix–xix. See also http://www.icomos.org/docs/san_antonio.html.
17. ICOMOS, *The World Heritage List, Filling the Gaps – An Action Plan for the Future* (Paris: ICOMOS, 2005).
18. WASA, "The Hunterfly Road Houses of Weeksville. Restoration Report," unpublished report, August 11, 2000, Alternate 1 – circa. 1900, p. 2.
19. Integrated Conservation Resources, "Historic Paint Analysis for Exterior Colors. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Exterior Restoration and Building Enhancement," unpublished report, June 11, 2007, p. 4.
20. Paul Goldberger, "The Liberation of the Guggenheim," *New York Times*, June 21, 1992.
21. Integrated Conservation Resources, 4.
22. F. G. Matero and R. FitzGerald, "The Fallacies of Intent: 'Finishing' Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum," *APT Bulletin* 38, no. 1 (2007): 3–14. Karla Schuster, "A Decorating Dilemma at Guggenheim," *Newsday*, October 14, 2007.