
CAN CRITICAL HERITAGE STUDIES PROVIDE A WORKABLE THEORY FOR THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATION?

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Abstract: This paper explores the relevancy of the nascent critical heritage studies movement to the future of built heritage conservation. Critical heritage studies theory assumes that conventional experts ignore or “sideline” the values of most stakeholders; heritage can be found everywhere; everyone is a heritage expert; significance and authenticity are based on sociocultural meanings and personal experience that are often independent of historical facts; and these values are dynamic and therefore cannot be fixed using lists. An analysis of the perspective offered by the critical heritage studies field leads to the conclusion that its directives, while useful in some contexts, tends to lead to the quagmire of cultural relativism. Significant elements of critical heritage studies theory are therefore difficult, if not impossible, for practitioners to apply in the real, tangible world. In order to increase the relevancy of critical heritage studies to built heritage conservation, a more grounded discussion between critical heritage studies scholars and built heritage practitioners is necessary as well as a more pragmatic focus on addressing real-world problems inherent in practice. Without this kind of grounding, critical heritage studies is likely to be increasingly irrelevant to built heritage conservation theory and practice.

Keywords: built heritage, critical heritage studies, future, practitioners, theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

The heritage sector is a confusing place that is often hard to define. Historians, architects, planners, museum administrators, and conservationists, among others, overlap on work that addresses objects, buildings, structures, places, landscapes, and stories, sometimes with little predictability. Built heritage conservation, however, is relatively well defined as a subset of this sector because it has long differentiated itself through its object of focus—buildings, but increasingly landscapes as well—and doctrine that begins with works by John Ruskin, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, and Camillo Boito and international texts such as the Athens and Venice charters. What also makes built heritage conservation unique, compared to the other areas of heritage practice, is a reliance on the regulatory environment to enforce this doctrine. Built heritage conservation is now old enough that a new field of study has arisen whose object of attention is not buildings, but rather the field of built heritage conservation itself,

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including its practitioners. Only recently coined “critical heritage studies”, this new field builds on existing heritage studies scholarship dating to the 1980s, and, as Laurajane Smith [1] relates, “takes us beyond the technical, and requires us to engage more critically with the concept of heritage, so that we also move beyond editorialising and simplistic case studies.” At its core, critical heritage studies rejects the “scientistic materialism” [2] inherent in built heritage conservation and replaces it with the meanings held by most stakeholders, which are in turn collected through social science methods.

Because of its social science perspective, critical heritage studies offers significant challenges to orthodox built heritage conservation practice, which this paper will explore. Before starting this analysis, however, it is useful to explain the nature of critical heritage studies and the ways in which its values are different from orthodox built heritage conservation theory and practice.

2. WHAT IS “CRITICAL HERITAGE STUDIES”?

When David Lowenthal [3] published *The Past is a Foreign Country* in 1985, it challenged many assumptions in international built heritage conservation practice. By the early 1980s, legislation had been passed in most developed countries to protect built heritage and rules created to regulate design in the name of authenticity. By most measures, the heritage conservation movement was finally achieving success—historic downtowns were being revitalized, historic house museums were flourishing, and, especially in the United States, we were still basking in the golden glow of the bicentennial celebration of American Independence and the resulting funds that governmental and private entities poured into preservation, restoration, and reconstruction. Yet, Lowenthal was anything but congratulatory toward the movement, instead focusing on the shortcomings of how practice fails to understand impacts to people and their relationship to heritage. His novel humanistic-geographical approach helped formed the basis of a new field of study now known as “critical heritage studies” [4]. While the ideas in *The Past is a Foreign Country* were unconventional from the perspective of built heritage conservation, similar concepts had been extant in post-processual archaeology at least a decade before the book’s publication. Like Lowenthal’s emphasis on the subjective nature of the past, which can never be known objectively, post-processual theory also deemphasizes the objective, scientific method of conventional (or processual) archaeology, instead framing archaeological practice as a series of acts that are fundamentally interpretive in nature [5]. In fact, most academic fields in the 1970s were undergoing this “post-modern” turn in rejecting the possibility of completely objective knowledge and emphasizing the way in which reality is constructed from meanings. Historic preservation and built heritage conservation were largely absent from this post-modern debate, and arguably, still are today. Critical heritage studies can therefore be accurately framed as a reminder that heritage conservation has yet to make this post-modern turn.

The acknowledged scholarly journal for critical heritage studies is the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Since 2012, the Association of Critical Heritage Studies, founded at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, officially represents the field. The goal of this organization, according to its manifesto, is to engage in “ruthless criticism of everything existing” and to “democratize heritage” by critiquing the “fetishising of expert knowledge” [6]. As Tim Winter [7] acknowledges, to date, the main enterprise of critical

heritage studies “is about criticising [accepted] professional practice and organisations like UNESCO, amongst others”; the goal of this criticism, according to Gibson and Pendlebury [8], is to “consider different cultural, historical and social values as equal” in order to “overcome the practical issues this presents for the management of heritage of historic environments and cultural landscapes.”

Researchers who comprise the field of heritage studies are primarily anthropologists, and more specifically archaeologists and museum studies specialists. I find this rather interesting because David Lowenthal, who wrote the field’s foundational text, is a humanistic-geographer who used phenomenology as a methodology, and not ethnography. To date, other humanistic geographers have found little of interest in the historic environment, leaving Lowenthal’s work entirely unique. This situation is compounded by the fact that the anthropologists who coopted his theories seem to have little interest in the use of phenomenology to investigate person/place relationships with the historic environment, although this does appear to be changing with more recent publications—especially those focusing on the historic environment, performance, and emotional affect [9]. Other disciplines, including planning, architecture, built heritage conservation, and public history, and conservation practitioners are not part of the dialog in critical heritage studies, but rather are objects that these anthropologists critique in their studies, usually focusing on some aspect of hegemonic practices and expert rule silencing the values of most stakeholders.

Geographically, critical heritage studies is a phenomenon of the English-speaking world, and most specifically, the United Kingdom, Australia, and less prominently, the United States. Similar dialogs are happening in other parts of the non-English speaking world, but to a more limited extent; for instance, many of the ideas that are part of critical heritage studies are also found in Brazil, largely through the writings of Silvio Zancheti [10], but this seems to be the exception. While the literature in critical heritage studies focuses on many cultures from around the world, I see very little evidence that researchers from the critical heritage studies field have engaged in non-English venues with their peers to present their work and debate issues.

3. REJECTION OF POSITIVISM

As one might imagine in the frame of post-modernism, critical heritage studies is based on the ontological perspectives of critical theory, constructivism, post-colonialism, and post-structuralism, while rejecting positivism, especially in terms of what is considered to be “significant” about the historic environment. Tainter and Lucas [11] describe orthodox approaches to heritage as resting on an empiricist-positivist paradigm, which assumes that experience is objective and remains consistent from one person to another, and all meaning is self-evident and therefore does not change over time. This paradigm is also explicit in assuming that significance is “present in a cultural property, rather than in the mind of the observer” [12]. What this means in practical terms is that the orthodox identification and treatment of built heritage is based on only those characteristics that can be directly perceived with or described through the senses, with the visual sense being the most important. In this perspective, other elements of experience, such as emotional connections with place and contemporary social and cultural meanings cannot be used because of their intangible qualities.

As Tainter and Lucas allude, orthodox heritage practitioners use the perspective of historical positivism to create narratives based on the systematic gathering of art/historical “facts” in order to create an argument for significance. This process, as Robert Morstein-Marx [13] emphasizes, “focus[es] upon independently verifiable fact, stripped of all (or as much as possible) subjective ‘taint,’ and [is] typically attended by the conviction, based on this reverence for facticity, that historical interpretation is something that somehow ‘emerges’ from the facts themselves after they have been thus properly verified.” Howard Green [14] refers to narratives based on historical positivism as an “outmoded ... concept of what history is and how it should be approached.” The problem with this method, according to C. Behan McCullagh [15], is that it fails to acknowledge that “facts of history acquire their meaning by being placed in an historical context”; moreover our assumptions of the nature of facts is important to consider as “historians do not discover facts about the past; rather they create them” [16]. What we treat as “facts” are in and of themselves interpretations, which is an essential characteristic that historical positivism does not capture, and which leads to an overconfidence of the purported accuracy and representation of orthodox significance narratives.

Salvador Muñoz Viñas [17] explores two fundamental, rationalist concepts from orthodox conservation theory related to positivism based on the need to identify “historic” places and determine how these places ought to be treated. He refers to these concepts as 1) the “material fetish,” which assists in identifying “real” versus “not real” heritage objects, and 2) “truth” or the reification of these heritage objects via various treatment options. Once authentic heritage objects have been identified, orthodox approaches seek a treatment method to conserve this authenticity. Muñoz Viñas [18] describes this process as a “truth-enforcement” operation that seeks “to reveal and preserve an object’s true nature or true condition,” which are ideas that Paul Philippot, Giovanni Carbonara, and Cesare Bandi have discussed extensively in the middle of the twentieth century. The way that this concept is presented in conservation doctrine is to not “lie”, which typically manifests as avoiding a “false sense of history” through the use of “conjectural features or features from other buildings” [19]. “Avoiding a false sense of history” is a common directive in the design guidelines used by historic preservation commissions in the United States and is also found in laws and design guidelines around the globe.

But what does a “false sense of history” really mean? If an object exists in a true state, then its inverse must also be true that objects can also exist in a “false” state with a “false” history. But what is a false object? And by extension, what does it mean for history to be “false”? The problem with these questions is that a false object implies an unreal object, or an object that does not exist. If I see an object, does it not by definition, exist and thereby deny its falsehood? If objects exist in real and false states, does that not also imply that an object can be brought into a “truer” state through an intervention? As Muñoz Viñas [20] clarifies, “The real, existing object can be altered through conservation to make it coincide with, or come closer to, a different preferred state, but the object will be no more real than it was before.” Another way of looking at this concept is that objects are exposed to events throughout the course of time; either these events happened or they did not. As it is applied, the directive of “avoiding a false sense of history” in essence has no direct bearing on past events, but rather focuses

on the desired appearance of the heritage object by reinforcing a certain version of memory in the present. In other words, preservation doctrine is directing practitioners to present a specific appearance of a heritage object to illicit a specific, imagined version of the past. As David Lowenthal [21] reminds us, "What is preserved, like what is remembered, is neither a true nor a stable likeness of past reality." And in terms of heritage objects, "falsehood is in the eye of the beholder" [22].

By rejecting positivism, however, critical heritage studies theory embraces cultural relativism, which could "potentially plunge heritage management into a relativistic morass, where all values are individual rather than collective and any possibility of a shared narrative illusory," warns Gibson and Pendlebury [23]. While positivistic approaches offer the assuredness of a firm foundation for decisions, critical heritage studies attempts to destroy this foundation, and with it, the entire enterprise upon which built heritage conservation has been based for the past 150 years.

4. CIVIL EXPERTS VERSUS CONVENTIONAL EXPERTS – EVERYONE IS AN EXPERT

Critical heritage studies is based on a dichotomy of the values of "civil experts" versus the values of "conventional experts." I borrow these terms from community-based archaeology [24], which defines a "civil expert" as a member of a community who understands his or her own heritage through cultural and personal expression and intuition. As such, these individuals are knowledge experts in terms of the characteristics of heritage that are meaningful to their community and reasons why these meanings are important. "Conventional experts" are individuals who are professionally trained and educated built heritage practitioners, planners, and environmental conservators. Conventional experts describe their meanings and values as objective and based on the scientific method and facts; these meanings depend on a Western, positivistic, Cartesian paradigm for their validity.

A major emphasis of critical heritage studies is exploring the identification and treatment of heritage from the perspective of civil experts and especially how conventional experts dominate and control this process. Smith [25] describes this hegemonic process as the "Authorized Heritage Discourse" (AHD) in which "the proper care of heritage, and its associated values, lies with the experts, as it is only they who have the abilities, knowledge and understanding to identify the innate value and knowledge contained at and within historically important sites and places." Moreover, Smith [26] makes the claim that the AHD has been used to "sideline" the values of most stakeholders. In order to remedy the AHD, Harrison [27] suggests that critical heritage studies wishes to "[break] down the bureaucratic divide between laypersons and experts, suggesting new models for heritage-decision-making processes in the future." Although sometimes misconstrued as an effort to replace expert values with laypersons' values, there is a desire to consider a wide range of values on a case-by-case basis. All values, regardless of their origin, should therefore be considered on their own merits [28]. In this sense, John Schofield [29] explains, "we are all heritage experts" because "everyone has a view, and everyone has expertise ... and will no longer simply accept the official view."

Randy Mason [30] characterizes the value system of conventional experts as "fabric centered" and the values of civil experts as "values centered," with the latter concept

encompassing a “full range” of values such as contemporary sociocultural meanings that are most often associated with “intangible” heritage along with expert values. According to Mason’s [31] dichotomy, “Values theory acknowledges the full range of values ascribed to a place, whereas fabric-centered theory frames the objective of preservation as the study and protection of things more as specimens of cultural process itself.” While the social and cultural values of civil experts are cited as playing an important role in valuing the historic environment [32], there is growing evidence that personal or experiential values may provide the greatest insight to understand how and why authentically “old” places elicit different emotional responses than “new” places [33]. Critical heritage studies is therefore “centered on people and sense of place” [34].

5. RATIONALISM VERSUS EMPIRICISM / FABRIC VERSUS MEANINGS

Critical heritage studies is especially interested in how communities define, value, and use historic places from the perspective of civil, as opposed to conventional, experts. This empirical or “evidence” basis to theory and practice is different from orthodox conservation theory that is largely rationalist in its origin [35]. According to Muñoz Viñas [36], orthodox conservation doctrines (e.g., the Venice Charter) do not contain “truth”, but rather tautologies because the directives and presuppositions contained in these documents do not have “a logical basis”; rather, proper conservation behavior is “defined as it is performed, and its use and repetition is what allows us to know and understand it” [37]. Orthodox conservation doctrine thus presents itself as “self-referential authority of conservation and management philosophy of practice” [38], based on “faith” rather than empirical evidence [39]. In this way, orthodox heritage doctrine shares much in common with Modernism, and its rationalist assumptions. This characteristic should not be surprising considering that orthodox conservation doctrine developed in parallel with Modernism and the latter’s defining interest in the use of styles to differentiate contemporary and “historic” architecture as well as an appeal to reason, rather than evidence, to defend its precepts [40].

Traditionally, built heritage conservation places a high value on the retention of physical fabric, which according to Muñoz Viñas [41], is based on the belief that only fabric that experienced past events or people is “real” or “genuine”. Even if it were possible to duplicate an historic object, down to the subatomic level, and perfectly reproduce every imperfection, the “copy” will still not be construed to be real or authentic. The idea is that the inanimate object has a “memory” of the past and that this event is somehow absorbed into its fabric. As Muñoz Viñas explains, this attitude in regard to authenticity is a kind of pseudo-scientific belief system held by experts, which treats a subjective belief as objective scientific truth. Waterton, Smith, and Campbell [42] take this idea a step further and attempt to characterize the entire belief system of experts, thereby positing that “the conservation values of experts might be just another set of cultural values.” Conservation doctrine, therefore, could be viewed as a kind of hegemonic system of one cultural group (i.e., conventional experts) imposing their unified belief system upon others (i.e., civil experts) [43].

In lieu of the assuredness of positivism and rationalism, Muñoz Viñas [44] offers a new, “contemporary” perspective that recognizes multiple truths based in semiotics

and not in fabric, and which also happens to characterize the platform upon which critical heritage studies is based: “[C]onservation is a means, and not an end in itself. It is a way of maintaining and reinforcing the meanings in an object; it is even a means through which the appreciation for what an object symbolizes is expressed.” Taking Muñoz Vinās’ argument to its extreme, what if, as Lowenthal [45] explores, the meanings associated with a heritage object are primarily based on fantasy, consumerism, and nostalgia instead of an objective account of history? What are the practice ramifications of significance based primarily on cultural practices [46], person-place relationships [47], and place attachment [48] and how should this affect management and policy? To date, these questions remain largely unanswered, but have been explored in critical heritage studies literature. Ultimately, critical heritage studies approaches assume that all heritage is, in essence, intangible because it is constructed from cultural and individual meanings, thereby rendering the separation between “tangible” and “intangible” heritage artificial [49].

In critical heritage studies, because significance and authenticity is defined from the perspective of civil experts, the use of a variety of social science research methodologies to discover their meanings is essential; within the field, the perspective is that these methodologies are imbued with power because they have the ability to create different versions of reality, but, at the same time, they are taken for granted and rarely exposed in detail [50]. This may seem strange from the perspective of a non-social scientist, but it is equivalent to built heritage conservation’s unstated assumption that the physical documentation of buildings is necessary; it has always been part of the process, so it is taken for granted. Such is the case with social science researchers because social science research methods are a taken-for-granted aspect of their reality as well. In terms of specific methodologies, ethnographies predominate, but other techniques can be found in critical heritage studies literature, including photo elicitation, survey research, drawing, GIS, and participatory research [51].

Because of its emphasis on intangible meanings, critical heritage studies’ effect on practice would be to diminish the importance of the conservation of physical fabric and replace it with an emphasis on the conservation of the *meanings* associated with the fabric [52]. The implication is that the fabric can change so long as the meanings associated with it are minimally affected. The challenge, however, is whose meanings receive more weight and in what context. On this last item, critical heritage studies scholarship is largely silent.

6. HERITAGE IS RARE AND ITS VALUES ARE FIXED VS. HERITAGE IS EVERYWHERE AND ITS VALUES CONSTANTLY CHANGE

Critical heritage studies assumes, as John Schofield explains, that heritage is everywhere and should offer “something for (and of) everybody” [53] and that “heritage is central to our experience of the world” [54]. Recent international conservation doctrine also recognizes this characteristic, such as the Council of Europe Framework Convention [55] in its characterization of heritage which “includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time.” This ubiquitous characterization of heritage means that *anyone* has the capability of recognizing its existence with the implication that this should somehow be honored.

Assuming that heritage really is everywhere presents significant problems in terms of officially recognizing heritage, which orthodox theory and practice concludes must always be rare and unique.

These meanings associated with built heritage are also dynamic, which poses a challenge to the long established practice of using historical “registers”, or lists of historic buildings and places, to inscribe the art/historical values buildings and places. By its very nature, the inscription process fixes these values so that they cannot respond to dynamic cultural processes [56]. These lists also assume that built heritage is rare, rather than ubiquitous. One perspective, offered by Anne Ross [57], is that heritage registers “‘fossilize’ the site, entrenching it as a static and unchanging component of a people’s heritage and thereby denying the active relationship traditional custodians may have with their cultural heritage.” This characterization is especially true with cultural landscapes where there is now a shift from preserving objects in the environment to conserving the “dynamic qualities” of the landscape [58].

Work in cultural landscapes emphasizes process as opposed to traditional built heritage conservation practice, which seeks stasis. There is a recognition that these landscapes are dynamic and must therefore change over time [59]. Simon Cane [60] explains that this systems-based approach assumes that “change is a constant, and that any intervention in the form of treatment alters the physical state of an object. ... A truly authentic state is unattainable due to the process of physical change over time, the phenomena of decay, and the decision to intervene to slow the process of change.” Even archaeological sites “are active, dynamic, contingent spaces of the production of social relations,” as Lisa Breglia [61] relates. If we assume that the relationship between people and place is “an ever-changing, dynamic phenomenon” [62], then the values associated with this dynamic experience need to be understood and used to influence built heritage conservation practice, as Zancheti and Loretto [63] advocate with their process of “dynamic integrity” in which “maintaining continuity of cultural meanings in time” replaces traditional notions of maintaining fabric.

7. HERITAGE IS CULTURAL AND OLD VS. HERITAGE IS NATURAL AND CULTURAL AND ANY AGE

Orthodox practice assumes that significance always resides in the past; in other words, what is important about an historic building or site is not related to meanings or events of the present, but entirely focuses on the hypothetical state of the historic place at certain points in the past. The problem is how far in the past does something have to happen for it to be significant? Critical heritage studies scholarship assumes that the answer could be as recent as today. In the United States, as is often found abroad, there is an arbitrary 50-year rule to define what is, and is not, historically significant. According to John Sprinkle, Jr. [64], the origins of this rule are political, rather than resting in some kind of rational or empirical basis. In the 1930s, National Park Service (USA) historians began to use this rule in order to neatly sidestep having to consider the historical significance of buildings and places built during the controversial Reconstruction era in American history. For convenience, this rule has survived unchanged to the present and is now an official criterion for the federal recognition of built heritage.

Critical heritage studies theory does not use an arbitrary temporal threshold to determine what is and is not heritage; rather, its scholars espouse the idea that built heritage should also encompass recent events that recognize the “surface” quality of personal experience as Schofield [65] explains:

We all recognize heritage as encompassing the iconic places of deeper history, places associated with notable events and individuals who did more than most to create the contemporary world. We are all familiar with the castles and great houses, the ruins of past civilizations and examples of monumentality. These exist the world over, their universality recognized through myriad approaches to heritage protection including UNESCO World Heritage status. But to limit our definitions to only these things is to misunderstand the nature of heritage. Some countries' legislation restricts the definition to buildings or places over 50 years old. Not only does this deny the existence of modern heritage, of the heritage we ourselves create, but more significantly it serves to disenfranchise whole communities who only value their familiar surroundings; who have no interest in Stonehenge, or other iconic monuments on the World Heritage List, yet they may value the place they were born, or a garden, or a street corner for some memory associated with it. ... Some people ... see the world largely in terms of their own personal experiences, and those of the generation before them. In archaeological terms this view relates only to the ground surface.... It makes no sense to ignore the surface, whether in archaeological or cultural heritage terms. And it is the surface where most people encounter the past.

Critical heritage studies scholarship does not conceptualize nature and culture as a dichotomy, but rather as a continuum, focusing on what Harrison [66] describes as the present and future “relationship[s] between people, objects, places and practices [without] distinguish[ing] between or prioritiz[ing] what is ‘natural’ and what is ‘cultural’.” Alan Dyer [67] describes the separation of heritage into “natural” and “cultural” categories as a “false dichotomy” because the imprint of humans is all over the planet, even in seemingly untouched natural landscapes: “the two forms of heritage are but two sides of the same coin, and a reflection of the two diversities.”

8. CAN CRITICAL HERITAGE STUDIES THEORY BE PUT INTO PRACTICE?

For all its careful critique of heritage conservation practice, two major failings of the critical heritage studies movement are that it does not offer practical solutions to remedy the issues it uncovers and marginalizes the potential role of conventional experts in discovering and addressing these issues. Winter [68] is clear in his concern that without a practical outcome of the movement, it will “become a marginal endeavour, by (further) alienating those working in the heritage sector outside academia.” Scholarship in the field objectifies and isolates practitioners (e.g., conservation professionals) in two ways: 1) critical heritage studies research tends to treat heritage practitioners as abstract entities or mere objects of study rather than discrete social actors in a community of practice; and 2) it denies heritage practitioners the ability to recognize, on their own terms, problems with the heritage sector and ways that these issues can be addressed. Simply put, critical heritage studies does not seem to consider that practitioners can be involved in helping improve how built heritage conservation is performed.

Because critical heritage studies addresses practice, it should be, in part, an applied endeavor focusing on changing practice. As Winter has suggested, the field should therefore represent a bridged approach between theory and practice where each informs the other. Currently, critical heritage studies seems to have little interest in its applied aspects, including treating conventional experts in the same manner as civil experts in its methodological approaches, which begs the question: What's the point of critiquing what is wrong with orthodox practice without a desire to fix the system? Such an improvement demands the participation of the very conventional experts that the critical heritage studies field mercilessly maligns. Considering that one of the goals of critical heritage studies is justice and empowerment [69], it is a paradox indeed that as the field embraces egalitarian, pluralistic ideals it concurrently seeks to marginalize, disempower, and sideline the conventional expert.

To provide a real world example of this situation, just prior to writing this article, I shared the AHD, which is considered to be a foundational principle of critical heritage studies, with members of a list serve for the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (USA). Members on this list are well-trained historic preservation professionals; most of these individuals have master's degrees and many have doctoral degrees in fields related to the conservation of the built environment. Not surprisingly, no one had heard of critical heritage studies or the AHD, but many were infuriated at being described as actively "sidelining" the values of most stakeholders and engaging in hegemonic practices when many honestly believed that they were helping communities and empowering them through historic preservation. Regardless of whether the AHD is an accurate description of these professionals' behavior, this example is emblematic of a fundamental problem with critical heritage studies: there is a vast gulf between academics and practitioners. While there are some exceptions, as academics, heritage studies researchers often have little practice background and make sweeping generalizations about practice without understanding its particulars. On the other hand, practitioners often have no idea that their work is being critiqued by these academics and, thus, are never invited to participate in a dialog. Unfortunately, critical heritage scholarship is largely silent on this issue, including how to bridge the divide.

Orthodox built heritage conservation relies on expert rule and the assumption that heritage is rare and unique to sort through objects which are worthy of official designation and those that are not. While far from perfect, the system actually works, and has for many decades across the globe, especially when embedded in the regulatory environment. As opposed to this top-down approach, critical heritage studies calls for bottom-up, stakeholder-engaged approaches to built heritage conservation. This perspective is presented as the desirable outcome for most heritage conservation projects, but with the exception of a few case studies, no author has put forth a pragmatic, applied method that can be easily used by practitioners to address Smith's AHD. Because the regulatory environment mandates the AHD, in many cases the law itself would need to be changed to empower stakeholders in bottom-up approaches, but this issue has yet to be addressed in the literature.

Critical heritage studies' emphasis on empowering the civil expert—i.e., most stakeholders—is problematic because it presents an alternative reality in which anyone can declare an object as historically significant, anyone can determine its authenticity, and anyone can make a decision on how to conserve this authenticity. Largely absent

from critical heritage studies' "ruthless criticism" is a method to evaluate the relative importance of values or to even acknowledge the possibility that some individuals may be more qualified to make decisions on these matters than others in some contexts. We have therefore arrived at cultural relativism and the impossibility of decision making because all values matter and all values are equal—a situation in which the degrading of authority and the resulting increased commercial exploitation of heritage threatens the very resources that is valued [70]. Sometimes these critiques can even deny the protection of heritage altogether, as Winter [71] describes, where "In their most strident form, critical approaches to heritage can even be anti-heritage." What is needed from critical heritage studies are methods for evaluating the values of civil and conventional experts in decision-making frameworks that recognize specific contexts. For instance, few people would argue against placing most conservation decisions about the Great Pyramids in the hands of conventional experts, while a decision about a local community garden perhaps is best left to civil experts who use and understand this landscape. Yet, critical heritage studies literature provides little real world, contextual cues to illuminate these essential differences between types of heritage and differences in communities of practice based on context.

Critical heritage studies' assumption that all heritage—built or not—is fundamentally intangible is undeniable because it takes human cognition to convert the subjective experience and objective observations of the historic environment into meaning and significance; meaning cannot reside inside of inanimate objects, so it therefore must reside in us. Orthodox conservation theory often fails to recognize this fundamental idea and perpetuates the unscientific idea that historic fabric has "borne witness to the past" as if it is a living thing. It is important to recognize, however, that this idea is prevalent in many non-Western cultures that privilege "spirit more than materials" [72], which presents a dilemma in terms of whose values are more important—the values of conventional experts or of the local population. Conventional experts pushing a Western, Cartesian view of their world on these local populations is likely to be construed as a continuation of colonialism.

On the other hand, we cannot simply ignore the tangible qualities of place. Indeed, research in environmental psychology is beginning to provide evidence that the presence of patina or decay in the environment is a fundamental prerequisite for an emotional attachment to the older built environment [73]. In addition, we know that people have the ability to differentiate "real" historic architecture from "fake" historic architecture [74], and when issues of building maintenance are not a factor, people do prefer genuinely old buildings to new buildings [75]. Clearly, evidence from this social science research should compel critical heritage studies researchers to spend more effort addressing the tangible qualities of place, but to date, this has not happened. The danger here is that by ignoring the physicality of place, such as the necessity of patina in the historic environment to engender emotional attachments to historic places, critical heritage studies researchers may imperil the very places and the communities that they study.

But perhaps one of the largest issues with critical heritage studies is its failure to engage with the regulatory environment and its impact on private property owners. Across the globe, laws and rules that are based on orthodox heritage conservation doctrine drive most built heritage conservation. For instance, in the United States, the vast majority of

work that happens on older buildings and places is because local municipalities require design review in local historic districts. There may be several reasons for this myopia, including the fact that most heritage studies researchers are from the archaeology and museum studies fields; most have never practiced as architectural conservators, urban planners, or historic preservationists. Simply put, there is essentially no literature on the overlap of the regulatory environment with critical heritage studies research. The only critical heritage studies researcher, of which I am aware, that is beginning to address this issue is Lucas Lixinski [76], who has correctly identified the reluctance of critical heritage studies researchers to address the overlap of their theories with the regulatory environment.

The law, in both its civil and common law forms, requires objectivity in its application and statutes and administrative law are written in a way to assure due process, so that everyone is treated fairly, and in exactly the same way. In terms of the historic environment, laws are written from the perspective of the values of conventional experts. There is no precedent for an administrative law to directly accommodate the subjective values of many stakeholders in the regulation of private property and to treat some stakeholders differently than others. Moreover, because critical heritage studies does not address many of the tangible aspects of place in its theories and offers no method for decision-making in which some people's values are more important than others, there is even less objective evidence to use within a body of law. Without these elements, decisions cannot be made and therefore built heritage cannot be protected, by law, using the perspective of critical heritage studies. In addition to critical heritage studies scholars readapting their theories, such an endeavor may even require that our legal frameworks change, as have been advocated by scholars from the new legal realism movement [77].

9. CONCLUSION

In an article clarifying what the "critical" in "critical heritage studies" should mean, Winter [78] ruminates on the potential of what the field can become by increasing its relevancy and applicability for real-world issues:

While critiques of policy approaches and paradigms will always be important, I argue ... that critical heritage studies should also primarily be about addressing the critical issues that face the world today, the larger issues that bear upon and extend outwards from heritage. This means, firstly, continuing to advance the approach that is currently the mainstay of critical heritage studies that is bringing a critical perspective to bear upon the socio-political complexities that enmesh heritage; tackling the thorny issues those in the conservation profession are often reluctant to acknowledge. But I would argue that at its most significant level it means better understanding the various ways in which heritage now has a stake in, and can act as a positive enabler for, the complex, multi-vector challenges that face us today, such as cultural and environmental sustainability, economic inequalities, conflict resolution, social cohesion and the future of cities, to name a few. Finally, it should also be about recognising there are critical challenges and benefits related to the safeguarding of culture and the preservation of heritage itself, an issue critical heritage theory too quickly dismisses or passes over.

In writing this passage, Winter clearly recognizes that critical heritage studies is not currently addressing “the larger issues that bear upon and extend outwards from heritage” as I have outlined in this paper. Until the field takes an interest in these larger issues, critical heritage studies may prove to be largely irrelevant to the conservation of the historic environment because its theories are unworkable in the real, tangible world. While Winter [79] acknowledges that “the professional conservation sector would benefit significantly from a sustained dialogue with those working in the space of critical heritage in the social sciences and humanities,” he does not offer ways to achieve this goal.

Orthodox conservation systems long ago established a clear line of authority to identify and protect heritage, with relatively simplistic systems based on what can be seen, which is then enforced by law. While imperfect, these systems function mostly as intended. In the absence of these control mechanisms, there is a concern that historic buildings, places, and landscapes will be lost in a radically pluralistic environment where no set of values seem to be more important than another; there will be, as Mason and Avrami [80] relate, “no simple, technical, objective way to make decisions.” Until the nascent field addresses its issues with cultural relativism and ways to involve practitioners, critical heritage studies and its *laissez faire* attitude may present more of a threat than a balm to the current state of built heritage conservation.

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Editor: Bogusław Szmygin

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Florence-Lublin 2016

Reviewers:

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Editor-in-Chief:

Bogusław Szmygin

Editing:

Karolina Kołb-Sielecka

Translations and corrections:

Katarzyna Sroka

Publishers:

International Scientific Committee for Theory
and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration ICOMOS

Romualdo Del Bianco Foundatione

Polish National Committee of International Council on Monuments and Sites ICOMOS

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The opinions expressed in the articles are the author's own and do not reflect the official view of International Scientific Committee for Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration ICOMOS

ISBN: 978-83-944481-2-7

Printed by:

Drukarnia ALF-GRAF,
Abramowicka 6, 20-442 Lublin