Embodiment unbound: Moving beyond divisions in the understanding and practice of heritage conservation

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This contribution discusses how embodied heritage values operate within a context of heritage sites, and tangible and intangible embodiments of what is valued as heritage. This is partly intended to re-contextualize ideas of material and materiality that have recently undergone reconsideration in conservation and heritage discourse. The paper questions the claim that ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ philosophies of conservation are very different, and that they can be characterized as being concerned with intangible and tangible heritage, respectively. This is based on the assertion that influential preservation doctrines are as much a product of the context and practical situations as they are a product of different philosophies and cultures. Well-known examples from East and West are discussed to highlight the similarities, as opposed to the differences, in approaches. The article goes on to discuss the UNESCO definition of intangible heritage (2003), which conflates the intangible embodiment of values with the intangible values attributable to all heritage. As a way to contextualize this, the article considers embodiment of heritage values as a means to express both intangible and tangible heritage sites (since neither embodiment nor sites have to be physical). This is described by way of a simple, pre-existing communication model that moves from information source (which transmits the message) through the medium (the heritage site or object) to the audience (heritage user). These insights are intended to provide a balanced perspective that accommodates both the site and the embodied values in order to help make and justify conservation decisions.

Keywords: Embodiment, Site, Values, Tangible, Intangible, Communication, Conservation, Heritage

Introduction
In this paper, I will consider some of the ideas and approaches in discussed heritage conservation, and the ways in which they are characterized in academic discourse and in policy. This is, in part, to re-contextualize the role of material conservation as its importance undergoes reconsideration within various sea-changes in conservation and heritage. The role of conservation has been re-examined (Avrami et al., 2000) and even openly questioned as an act of material fetishism (Muñoz Viñas, 2005). Conservation of material has also been criticized as a reinforcement of the ‘authorized heritage discourse’, the notion of a dominant reading of heritage that naturalizes assumptions and practices about its nature (Smith, 2006). This is connected to a shift in the understanding of what heritage is, and therefore how to approach conservation and management. It is intended that re-examining conservation approaches can help contextualize differences, partially through building on existing developments such as the Nara declaration of authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994). In particular, I wish to examine the effect of depicting approaches as concepts as opposed and exclusive of one another, as this develops reductive approaches to conservation, which has a direct impact upon the context in which conservators make choices and decisions. There are various examples of this that feature in academic discourse, such as the differences in approaches to conservation between the ‘Western world’ and the ‘East’, and the division between ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ heritage (e.g. Smith, 2006, 2011; Solli, 2011). Such discourse forms the backdrop to policy, such as charters and professional guidelines, under which all conservation processes are judged. I also will examine the notions of a division between East and West in terms of heritage conservation and consider whether this can really be attributed to cultural differences alone (e.g. Wei & Aass, 1989; Stille, 2002, 2005; Smith &
Akagawa, 2009). I will consider whether the approaches are really as different as suggested, and question whether the characterization of material conservation as a Western philosophy and intangible heritage as an Eastern philosophy truly represents the situation that faces conservators. This will include consideration of common features and how they contribute to one another in direct and indirect ways as a way to acknowledge and accommodate the differences in discourse and conservation approach that have been identified as dichotomous or problematic. I will be taking examples well-known for highlighting differences in approaches to conservation, but looking to find common elements. The term ‘heritage sites’ will be used in this article, referring to anything that embodies what is valued as heritage, whether this is an object, collection, song, building, oral tradition, or landscape.

The paper is also intended to connect with discussion in related fields, such as debates in archeology over the relative importance of the social relevance of material (materiality) versus its physical properties (e.g. Ingold, 2007; Knappett, 2007; Miller, 2007; Tilley, 2007). However, a full discussion of these related debates is not within the scope of the paper presented, which will focus on conservation.

In order to think about how these seemingly opposed elements of heritage are connected, I will consider how heritage sites are managed over time, since the influence of key factors such as material is not a short-term matter. After this, I will turn to communication theory, on the understanding that heritage is a communicative, social practice (Dicks, 2000) as a means to describe the role of conservation. I will use a simple communication model (simple to avoid too much association with features peculiar to mainstream communication, and to maximize applicability to heritage) introduced by Shannon & Weaver (1949). In doing so, I hope to illustrate the influence that tangible and intangible heritage have on one another, and the benefits of acknowledging this in the policy and practice of heritage conservation. Much of this is connected to how value is embodied by heritage with the intention of developing descriptive tools to help understand and sustain heritage.

**Heritage value**

From a conservation perspective, the role of value attachment will be considered within the context of heritage sites, tangible, and intangible, with the aim of connecting this to other intangible concepts that are prevalent in heritage.

Heritage values are socially constructed and fluid, context-driven, and often contested (Gibson & Pendlebury, 2009). The term ‘value’ has been broken down to develop category sets and typologies (e.g. Reigl, 1903; Frey, 1997; Australia ICOMOS, 1999; Mason, 2002; English Heritage, 2008). However, the categorization of fluid, subjective constructs can only be applied to specific contexts (Mason, 2002), because types vary in importance, overlap, and are expressed in different terms. The term value is also used in different ways in heritage discourse. For example, Reser & Bentrüperbäumer (2005) noted two common variants to indicate things people find important, such as aesthetics or historical information (noun), and also the extent to which a site is considered important (verb). Both of these can be interpreted variably between contexts and languages to add to the complexity and fluidity of the matter. I will use values to mean ‘those qualities regarded by a person, group, or community as important and desirable’ (Carter & Bramley, 2002, p. 178).

The recognition of the role of values in heritage, that is, its power to ‘give some things significance over others and thereby transform some objects and places into “heritage”’ (Avrami et al., 2000, p. 7) is relatively recent. Acknowledgement of the consequences for conservation were identified by the Getty Conservation Institute, with the suggestion that ‘the ultimate aim of conservation is not to preserve material for its own sake, but rather to maintain (and shape) the values embodied by the heritage’ (Avrami et al., 2000, p. 7). This notion of transformation (and heritage appropriation) discussed by Avrami et al. (2000) was a significant step for conservation, which reconsidered the privileged role of historic material within heritage, and the purpose of conserving it. However, this suggests that ‘heritage’ is the object, the embodiment. One could build on this to suggest that the values are very much part of the ‘heritage’. Heritage is not the object or material itself, but the reason that the object is conserved. The site is the medium for holding and transmitting those values. A consequence of this, which will be discussed later, is that a site does not need to be tangible to embody value, since songs and rituals are able to transmit heritage values in this way.

Traditionally, conservation has focused on the medium of embodiment (rather than the embodied values or messages) and the relatively recent developments in heritage have clarified the need to reconsider the role of material in conservation (e.g. Smith, 2006). It is no longer sufficient to say that the material is ‘the heritage’. This paper suggests that the embodied form – the ‘site’ is only heritage when those values are communicated. The parallels with Dicks’ (2000) assertion that heritage is a communicative social practice are evident within conservation theory through Muñoz Viñas’ comment that conservation as the negotiation of a social contract could successfully substitute the paradigm of scientific conservation (2002, p. 30).
and that conservators act as social negotiators in terms of sustaining different heritage values (Muñoz Viñas, 2005).

Production and consumption
As heritage values are discursive in nature, it is something ‘produced’ and ‘consumed’ by people and communities. Consequently, this is a cyclic process – something embodied by a heritage site but the production and consumption of heritage continually operates through it.

With this and Avrami et al.’s (2000) comments above in mind, one could argue that values are communicated discursively but often through material culture. Materiality and environment, and their interaction, have a deep impact on the way in which we value heritage and the choices we make about it. It is not always an explicit process, but materiality affects our understanding of the way in which we depict conservation – not just material culture, but all kinds of heritage.

Discourse related to conservation involves a good deal of abstraction, much of which is attributed to philosophies and approaches that are based on individual thinkers or social ideals that have determined what is required from heritage and its preservation. This includes ethical concepts articulated by John Ruskin, William Morris, and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, founded in England in 1877, of the importance of material authenticity as evidence of the past, and the need to maintain it for succeeding generations. Ruskin argued that restoration ‘is a lie from beginning to end’ (Ruskin, 1855, p. 32), since no building can be restored to its original condition, stating that slow decay was preferable to restoration, a ‘false description of the thing destroyed’ (Ruskin, 1855, p. 177). The approach is often used to characterize the Western approach to conservation, and the Association’s influence is to be found in modern conservation policy documents (Caple, 2000). Although these ideas about conservation were not the only ones presented in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they began to dominate conservation discourse and characterize the approach to heritage preservation carried out in the Western world.

This focus on material conservation is also claimed to be in contrast to the approaches characterized as ‘Eastern’. This dichotomy is somewhat artificial, but a highly influential construct. Consequently, there is much made of the differences between ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ philosophies of conservation in academic discourse (e.g. Wei & Aass, 1989; Stille, 2005; Smith, 2006; Wells, 2007; MacKee, 2008; Smith & Akagawa, 2009), the claim being that the West only regards tangible or material aspects, and the East focuses on intangible heritage. However, they do not mention the impact of the materials present. This is a common feature of discussion of the ‘East–West’ differences within heritage discourse. For example, Wei & Aass claimed that differences in Eastern and Western approaches to conservation stemmed from ‘differing underlying approaches to the cosmology of the world’ (1989, p. 8). The demonstration of these differences was the contrasting condition of Qufu, the Confucian temple complex in China, and the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. However, they do not mention that the wooden temple complex of Qufu burned down and was rebuilt twice (UNESCO, 2013a), nor that the religious beliefs held by those who built the Parthenon have not survived but the material survived discontinuation of use and abandonment, fires in antiquity, Roman repairs, Venetian bombardment, and partial removal (Lambrinou, 2010).

The influential Nara document emphasizes that what is authentic will vary in different situations, ‘all cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression which constitute their heritage’ (ICOMOS, 1994, article 7). Where the Nara document respects differences between conservation approaches, I wish to look at similarities between how different situations are considered. This does not contradict but builds on the work of the Nara conference.

The pervasive influence of materiality
Approaches may contrast, but the reasons for these approaches may not be as abstract as they are sometimes presented, nor as different. They are responses to their physical environments, specifically the interaction of the historic material with its environment, just as much as the values of the time. The notion of conserve-as-found characterized by Ruskin and Morris was largely connected to monumental, stone buildings (and then buried archeology). In such cases, the vulnerable material is lost by the time the site is declared heritage, so material authenticity has a natural bias towards more robust elements. There are also considerations that are not reflected in this approach. Managers of natural heritage, for example, are not troubled by the same issues of authenticity (Howard, 2003).

It is not my intention to disregard the cultural differences, nor claim that different writings and practices play no role, nor that conservation is not influenced by cultural shifts over time. It is to point out that differences in approaches are as much because of materiality as in spite of it. Even cultural practice can be influenced by the material qualities of the heritage site.

Wei & Aass (1989) and others rightly point out the bias towards material preservation found in the Venice charter (ICOMOS, 1964). However, conservation
discourse and policy can reinforce concepts that were generated in a specific context. Doctrines and conventions may have formalized the way heritage and conservation are viewed and understood, but such codifications are rooted in the practical problems that were faced by the people who wrote them. Such conventions go on to establish a lasting set of relationships that dominate discourse (Smith, 2006). Nishimura (1995) and Choay (2001) chart historical conservation activity in Japan and France, respectively, revealing a more nuanced and changeable story than a simple division. The mutual interaction of cultural values and material formed over time is a part of this.

As well as the properties of any given embodiment of heritage, material qualities have a pervasive influence on choices and practices. If one type of material cannot last long in a given physical environment, a conservation ideology of the material is not sustainable. In other words, the preservation of material is influenced by its own qualities, and this is contextualized by interactions and circumstances that occur before it is considered ‘heritage’. How heritage value is embodied – even if the embodiment is not tangible – is influenced by materiality and the response of material to its environment. Social and material mediation are not exclusive of one another. When an artist or artisan or architect creates an artifact, he or she selects materials and structures considered suited to the task at hand, and thereby sets the timescale for the survival of the artifact. The Egyptian Pyramids were designed to last forever; nylon stockings are not designed to last very long (Orna et al., 1994, p. 57). Consequently, how heritage value is embodied – even if the embodiment is not tangible – is influenced by materiality and the response of material to its environment.

The reality of conservation is, of course, much more nuanced than a simple division based on single, consistently applied philosophical approaches. For example, the Binzuru wooden statue from the 1700s outside the reconstructed, steel-reinforced Tódai-Ji Temple in Nara, Japan consists solely of original material, touched regularly by people who believe it brings good health. The Parthenon marbles were chemically and mechanically cleaned to return them to the whiteness that were once thought to be their original appearance (Oddy, 2002).

However, it is worth deconstructing the division a little further by considering some of the examples that have been used in conservation literature to express the differences between actual approaches in East and West against the idea of an abstract division that has always existed. This is not intended as a survey of Eastern and Western conservation, but a closer examination of the tensions inherent in the division. For this purpose, I will discuss well-known examples: the Ise Grand Shrine – a Japanese shrine that dismantled and reconstructed with new materials every 20 years and Stonehenge, a monument that is approximately 4000 years old. These sites have been used to demonstrate contrast, but I would like to look at them from a different angle: the practical situations faced in terms of their conservation rather than the approaches to conservation themselves.

Ise Grand Shrine

The Ise Jingû is a complex of shrines in the south of Japan. With over 100 shrines, the complex was established 2000 years ago, but famously, since 690, the temples and bridge have been dismantled and rebuilt on nearby locations every 20 years. Consequently, the preservation of the temples does not focus on the material authenticity. The skills used to maintain the temples, and their appearance, are preserved but not the material itself. ‘The Ise shrine is not a tangible cultural property but a unique example of a living tradition of a building whose value is not defined by the criteria of the material’ (Tokoro, 2001, p. 22). The Ise Grand Shrine was in fact a key subject in discussion on authenticity at the Nara conference of 1995 (Larsen, 1995) to illustrate that the material is not a prerequisite of authenticity.

The shrines are made of untreated Japanese Cypress and reside in an environment of high temperatures and humidity (summers of up to 30°C and 90% relative humidity (RH)), which is not conducive to preservation. ‘It is really remarkable what 20 years of exposure to the elements in the Japanese climate does to unadorned wood’ (Larsen, 1994). Such a climate and rate of chemical deterioration is also conducive to termite and insect pest infestation that can have a devastating effect on wooden structures – a common cause for short life cycles of wooden structures in South Asia (Ito, 1995). Damage from earthquakes is also more common in South Asia than Europe. Consequently, the choice of sustaining the structures through a deliberate cycle of regeneration was not just a religious custom based on passing traditions through generations, but a response to the practical realities of how material can survive over time. ‘Twenty years means the life cycle of the deities, just the same as a human generation, and also indicates the time limit by which the bottom of columns, whose diameter can be up to thirty centimeters, will decay’ (Ito, 1995, p. 40). This is also supported by technical studies of the durability of cypress wood that suggested a lifetime of 15–25 years if in ground contact (Rudman, 1963).

Another matter is that much of the heritage was made from wood in the first place. These issues are connected, and the large extent of wooden heritage in China and Japan comes from environments where
high temperatures and humidity lead to quick growth of vegetation. The soft ground is also not supportive of heavy structures, even with elaborate foundations (Ito, 1995). In fact, detailed studies of earthquake regions demonstrate that light wooden, vernacular buildings have demonstrated surprisingly good resistance (Jigyasu, 2008).

It is also important to consider the religious aspects that are attributed to the choice of 20 years. The deities are connected to the vegetation, and so life cycles of plants are therefore those of the deities connected to the site (Ito, 1995). The life cycles of the deities – and part of the reason for the timeframe of systematic reconstruction – are a product of the environment, influenced by the same climate that leads to the prodigious growth and fast deterioration of vegetation.

Considering the situation, it is difficult to see how one could begin to preserve original material for very long. Differences would be seen within a generation. How ‘original fabric’ could be utilized for long enough that it would be recognized or designated as ‘heritage’ without change or intervention is very problematic. Figs. 1 and 2 are of wooden structures in the Ise Shi temple complex 17 years into the 20-year cycle. They illustrate the toll beginning to show on the untreated wood even above ground. Photos of the grand shrines themselves are not allowed, but these close-ups of nearby buildings (Fig. 1), including small structures (Fig. 2), demonstrate the evident change in material and consequent need for replacement. Less visible is the ground contact of load-bearing elements, where most rot damage would normally occur (Rudman, 1963).

**Stonehenge**

Stonehenge appears to present the polar opposite, as a mark of the Western approach where material preservation dominates over intangible issues. Stonehenge is a unique stone circle of prehistoric date (3000–1600 BC), considered a masterpiece of creativity and engineering, now the heart of a World Heritage Site in the UK, spanning 2000 ha (Young *et al.*, 2009). It also demonstrates that a single site can maintain multiple contested discourses simultaneously that may not even connect with the site’s early history.

The druidic practices, based on William Stukeley’s influential theory of the eighteenth century (Stukeley, 1740), are maintained as intangible heritage of the site. However, this is unproven as the first known meeting of druids at Stonehenge was 1905 (Richards, 2004, 2007). The English Heritage website states that ‘the true meaning of this ancient, awe-inspiring creation has been lost in the mists of time’ (English Heritage, 2012), thus explaining the significance it held in the community that created it is very difficult. Preserving the use and spirit of its functional life is not yet possible. Identified social and spiritual values of the site tend to be related to the seventeenth century and after, as knowledge about the intangible practices of its creation is speculative (Young *et al.*, 2009).

This has left the site somewhat exposed to interpretation, and has been used in a variety of contexts for a range of ideologies. Peoples’ responses to Stonehenge have often been influenced by their own socioeconomic situation and their vision of their own society – what Castleden calls ‘temporal chauvinism’ (1993, p. 7). Bender (1999) observes that Stonehenge was either abandoned or avoided in the Bronze Age. Cowell (2008) points out that its first recording as a heritage site was part of an attempt to document Roman heritage.

Turner’s painting of Stonehenge, completed in 1828 (Fig. 3), depicts the site as a Romantic ruin. The upright sarsen is depicted as more slender than in real life – a case where intangible values affect the way the material is understood.

‘The original builders left a monument that continues to puzzle and intrigue, and while theories about the reasons for its construction, the manner of

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**Figure 1** Vegetation growth on a shrine at Ise Jingū.

**Figure 2** Biological activity and water damage at Ise Jingū.
its use and its role as a sacred place abound, these can be but speculation (Young et al., 2009, p. 36), and the society that created it and their practices disappeared long before its designation. However, the material remains to the extent that information about its construction can still be gathered from the surface of the stones (Richards, 2004; Young et al., 2009).

Since the original function of the site is unknown, and the ways in which it is valued and understood are changeable, the stone structure is the most constant aspect of the site. The decision on whether one should concentrate on the material or the value is already made to some extent. However, even in this context, minimal intervention is not always possible. In 1919, a restoration program led by Arthur Evans (famed for work on Knossos) began that involved re-erecting and repositioning stones and providing a concrete foundation (Chippindale 2004). Its inscription on the World Heritage List includes 2000 ha of landscape to benefit its interpretation by visitors.

Common ground in different contexts
Such physical realities – namely that the material cannot be preserved forever – ensure that attempts to solve (and define) are done within the context. How heritage values are communicated is connected to the context of its embodiment. These contexts involve people facing different circumstances who were doing the best they could to sustain their heritage. By examining these two examples, and also the Qufu temple complex and the Parthenon, one can see that even the most polar examples of heritage conservation involve a dynamic, context-driven situation that is influenced by both cultural considerations and the way the material interacts with its environment.

To see this materiality-based reading of the two examples from another perspective, the Japanese rock cliff sculptures of Buddha are perhaps most comparable to Stonehenge. These tuff and sandstone carvings have endured severe damage, leading to surface losses, fissures, and breakages. However, the approach to their conservation has been reattachment, consolidation (Nishiura, 1986), and insulated shelters (Miura, 1994) to preserve material. This is similar to the Mogao grottoes in China, where heavily deteriorated original material was consolidated (Nishiura & Zuixiong, 1988) and the climate controlled (Maekawa, 1994).

Norwegian stave churches, although built from resistant pine heartwood in a climate much more suited to wood preservation (Larsen & Marstein, 2000), have been the subject of systematic replacement over the centuries. Selective replacement of sections such as roofing continues, along with the preservation of craft skills (Riksantikvaren, 2013). The stave church at the Norwegian Folk Museum (from Gol) was dismantled in 1880 for relocation to the museum, with only one-third of the material being sent, making it closer in resemblance to Borgund stave church than early images (Anker & Havran, 2005). A more sophisticated notion of authenticity than a polemic presents itself.

Conservation philosophies cannot be signified by specific examples, nor can it by a global division between tangible and intangible preservation. This simplification is undermined by various kinds of heritage, approaches to conservation and geographical locations that fall outside such a distinction. The sand drawings of Vanuatu, finger-drawn designs communicating multiple messages, were designated as World Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. The sand drawing is something that is produced and depleted and, over time, communicates a way of life (UNESCO, 2013b). The embodiment is ephemeral, but a vital part of the process. In conservation terms, one can see objects with a multitude of functions, such as Tibetan clay tsha-tshas, that can be presented to conservators in a wide range of conditions based on the relationship between the material and the values that they have embodied (Reedy, 2006). Thorn (2006) describes ways of working between different cultures in Australia and common elements in approaches that can lead to solutions that contribute to both material preservation and maintaining the messages embodied within.

The philosophies and customs of conservation were developed before a backdrop of materiality when faced with practical problems of embodying cultural heritage. Such physical realities – namely that the material cannot be preserved forever – ensure that attempts to solve (and define) conservation problems are done within a context. How heritage values are communicated is connected to the context of its embodiment. These contexts involve people facing different circumstances who were doing the best they could to sustain
their heritage. As stated earlier, I certainly do not wish to deny either the cultural influence of the writings and movements that communicated ideas that are still discussed and debated, or the cultural differences; but the philosophies and the customs of conservation were developed by those faced with these practical problems of deterioration.

Application of a conservation doctrine out of context

The Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 1999) is a fine example of what can be done dealing with the heritage of different cultures – and its third version has been a big influence on many countries. Instead of focusing on the methods of preservation, the charter considered the significance of the place (fabric, setting, use, meanings) as the main focus. Consequently, the approach is somewhat more cautious, yet flexible in responding to the given context, so that you only change ‘as much as necessary but as little as possible’ (Australia ICOMOS, 1999, article 3.1). This breaks away from the dichotomy, but corresponds with my argument: how conservation efforts have been characterized does not reflect the realities that we have been dealing with.

I will explore this further by looking at a case that illustrates the incongruity that stems from a philosophical approach being applied outside its context, also originating from Australia. In this case, a problematic relationship between materiality, change, and conservation developed at Rouse Hill House and Farm in New South Wales, Australia where a ‘Ruskinian’ conservation doctrine was applied to a vulnerable building in an aggressive environment. This is intended to move discussion outside the boundaries of East and West implied in the literature and consider the consequences of decisions to both site and values.

Rouse Hill House and Farm

Rouse Hill House and Farm is a farmhouse with land that housed six generations of Australians from the McQuarrie era (1809–1821) to 1978, and a rare example of colonial lifestyle. A construction of stone and wood with a corrugated iron roof, the house holds 20,000 objects of varied material. It was identified as historically significant as ‘a record of family occupancy’ and as ‘a time capsule of late nineteenth century taste’ (Broadbent & Bogle, 1990, p. 26).

The climate is also very challenging for material preservation, with large daily swings in relative humidity, and the levels that vary from 20 to 90% RH during the year, with variable temperature and high levels of ultraviolet (UV) radiation and a number of insect pests that can cause considerable damage to wooden structures, in particular, termites such as the very damaging Coptotermes Acinaciformis (Scott, 2010). Its preservation is the result of a conservation philosophy to preserve it exactly as it was left, that is to preserve the ‘cumulative, unedited archive’ (Broadbent & Bogle, 1990, p. 34) of the estate as a historical, material record.

The original conservation plan was a very strict position of minimal intervention, which did not allow anything to be replaced, with the intention of creating a ‘time capsule’ (Broadbent & Bogle, 1990, p. 26) of when it was handed over to public trust. Clear priority was given to material authenticity. Simple measures like placing UV filters on windows could not, therefore, be applied to preserve the contents, and replacement of fabric was an extreme measure. However, materials cannot be frozen in time. The estate’s material has been subjected to natural aging and termites, so it still appears different from the time it was taken into trust (Figs. 4 and 5). In 2008, the website stated that ‘due to the fragile nature of this site, access to the property is by guided tour only’ (Historic Houses Trust, 2008), a practice that continues today with a virtual tour available, so physical access has become limited. Now, only the ground floor can be physically accessed by visitors.

Figure 4  Rouse Hill House and Farm, Australia. Courtesy of Sydney Living Museums, Historic Houses Trust of NSW.  
Figure 5  Deterioration inside Rouse Hill House. Courtesy of Sydney Living Museums, Historic Houses Trust of NSW.
The original plan gave direct reference to Ruskin’s doctrine, and was a conscious contradiction of the evolving Burra Charter ‘described as “Ruskinian”’. (HHT, 1997). The unflinching focus on materiality has generated problems where the embodied values are in danger. The philosophical stance that led to the conservation plan was taken directly from two passages in Ruskin’s (1855) *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. These were ‘an appreciation that buildings are collections of fabric’ (HHT, 1997, p. 9) and that preserving this fabric ‘is the means of preserving this evidence for future generations’ (HHT, 1997, p. 9). Interpretation was intended to be based on examining the fabric. Alternative approaches were defined as ‘restoration ethics’ for aesthetic or interpretive purposes that undermined the integrity of the house. However, Ruskin’s doctrine developed with large stone buildings was applied to a house with vulnerable contents and fabric that had not already lost the most fragile components.

The approach was acknowledged to be radical, but simply an existing approach applied with more rigor than in other historic houses (Broadbent, n.d.). Although the preservation policy was declared to be simple (Broadbent & Bogle, 1990), the implications for the Historic Houses Trust were deeply complicated for future management. ‘Uncertainties in decision-making arise from the policy’s deliberate lack of guidance for conservation prioritization. This problem is compounded where the significance of individual components are intricately tied to and derived from the wider entity, and decision-making becomes even more seriously impaired where elements are in advanced stages of deterioration that lie beyond the reach of a doctrine of minimal intervention’ (Scott, 2010, p. 3).

As the site continued to change, the kinds of preservation actions required for some types of value became incompatible with the conservation plan. Scott states, ‘as erosion of the interiors accelerates the outcome will be irrecoverable change. Beyond this point, historical evidence and authenticity may survive, but survive as a series of disconnected threads, boxed and shelved, de-contextualised and perhaps impossible to reunite in a meaningful way’ (2010, p. 6).

Recent management to the site has provided for a more inclusive approach that aligns site and value instead of focusing on one or the other. However, the policy of minimal intervention to preserve material authenticity has left a profound mark. The case demonstrates the difficulty of applying such doctrines outside their original context, and the extent to which approaches and doctrines include materiality implicitly, as opposed to explicit reference to material and its preservation. This is a matter that grows in importance as the house and the contents start to change.

Privileging the preservation of material in an environment that engenders change involves relying on a vulnerable part of the relationship between value and embodiment. Consequently, that relationship cannot be sustained. In the case of Rouse Hill, the intention was maintain a time capsule for future generations, but over time the policy began to jeopardize the potential for future generations to obtain the values embodied in the site.

When heritage values are discussed, one cannot isolate them from their embodied form. They both have a vital role to play in all kinds of heritage. I would argue that it is their interaction that makes ‘heritage’. So, these decisions about what is considered heritage and what is preserved have to start from what is possible before they can reflect societal or intellectual notions of heritage. However heritage is preserved, there is an embodiment of the values, only the embodiment does not have to be physical.

**Intangible heritage policy**

Having discussed the pervasive influence of materiality as a means of moving beyond ‘East–West’ distinctions of material and intangible, I will turn to the designation of intangible heritage. Intangible heritage denotes renewable processes that follow, a cycle of production and consumption that is similar to how I described heritage value. It could be argued that some confusion lies behind this issue from the way in which intangible is expressed.

When Laurajane Smith stated that ‘all heritage is intangible’ (2006, p. 3), she was referring to the values of heritage – the discursive elements embodied by the material, regarded as important by individuals or communities. However, this is a little different from what UNESCO refers in their *World Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Their definition of intangible heritage is:

*The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.*

*This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.*

(UNESCO, 2003, article 2.1, author’s emphasis)

Considering this definition, there seem to be two ideas of intangibility that are being conflated here. The top
paragraph deals with its embodiment. Although the embodiment is intangible, it connects directly to the embodiment of discourse discussed earlier. The bottom section deals with heritage values, discourse, and messages consistent with Smith’s (2006) statement above. This embodied values of tangible heritage discussed by Avrami et al. (2000), mentioned earlier, which are also continually produced and consumed, relate to this. However, neither the embodiment nor the values are tangible.

Creating a convention that separates tangible from intangible is not a simple matter, nor always even a desirable one. In doing so, the matters can become confused by focusing on the kind of embodiment rather than teasing out why something is valuable and how those values are embodied. The UNESCO definition offers no distinction between value and manifestation – but this distinction is an important one, since this is the relationship that communicates heritage.

- **Intangible value**: ‘important’ qualities that are continually renewed and embodied by a site. These are the contextual associations and the qualities that people find important, such as the historical and aesthetic value of a painting.

- **Intangible embodiment**: process, event, etc. that communicates value and discourse. These are sites without continuous physical embodiment, such as a process or language. Like tangible heritage, they also hold a range of intangible values.

Combining the two is a problem because they have distinct roles. I would not suggest that one is heritage and one is not – in fact, I would argue that it is when the two meet (when value is embodied) that heritage exists.

**A model of embodied discourse**

The embodiment is what carries the message (or values), so acts as the medium, just as physical markers do, through which the values and information are transmitted. Intangible heritage changes over time, but so does physical heritage. A way to differentiate between the two in terms of considering heritage sites is to work from the notion of heritage as a communicative, social practice described by Dicks (2000). Dicks discussed the encoding and decoding of heritage as a way to identify the practice that took place at heritage sites. Taking the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1980), she considers heritage sites, such as museums, to be media by which cultural meaning is negotiated between those producing heritage discourse and those receiving it. These same processes of encoding and decoding take place in communication, referred to as transmission and reception in a model of communication by Shannon & Weaver (1949).

Shannon and Weaver’s diagram (Fig. 6) is a very basic model that can be applied to various forms of communications and communicative practices. A key point of their model is that communication is sent and received via a medium. The medium can be anything that can aid with the transmission and reception of a message. The model is a simplification of the communication process, and communication science has more recent, more esoteric models. This is intended to be a model for heritage and conservation, rather than a portrayal of communication per se. For the purpose of connecting to heritage, a simple and inclusive idea of communication using fundamental principles offers more opportunity than esoteric models focusing on particular modes of technology. No communication models are ideal, and developing a bespoke model for heritage may be useful, but outside the scope of this paper. This serves as a starting point to highlight and explore some of the complexities and nuances of the dynamic, multi-layered relationship between sites and discourse. This gives insight into the inter-relation of message and medium, and the presence of ‘noise’ that affects that medium – the principal interest of conservation.

In heritage terms, creators and communities encode the message, which is embodied through the medium, such as a song, an object, or a building. The performance, display, or use takes place when that medium is transmitting messages. This, in turn, is decoded by ‘consumers’ or ‘audiences’ of heritage. The noise which affects a site is change, which can be deterioration or conservation which affect the mediums’ capacity to receive and transmit that message. What this illustrates is that heritage is the ‘event’ that happens, or takes place, when site and discourse meet, when the message is embodied by the medium.

The extent to which change (noise) affects these messages is the interest of conservation.

As the sites change, through deterioration or intervention (noise), the message and its significance can change to a vulnerable medium means the information is lost, or that change has no impact until the medium is lost. As Muñoz Viñas points out, ‘any damaged symbolic object may well continue to be symbolic in its new state’ (2005, p. 197). Although he suggests...
that such an outcome raises doubt about the reasons for conservation’s existence, it is one of the many outcomes that are connected to identifying the information and the values embodied by the site.

Cycles of change
This basic model does not reflect the feedback that is a key feature of the heritage that survives generations, nor does it explicitly reveal the poly-vocal nature of the discourse and the narratives surrounding the heritage. There is no single voice that dictates heritage discourse, and the dangers of a singular heritage narrative have been discussed in detail (Olsen, 1986; Smith, 2006). This corresponds with communication and cultural interaction. So, for example, a radio may receive many messages that could be transmitted from different locations (simultaneously with heritage). Different stations broadcast their messages to be picked up, but via a medium that allows them to be received by listeners. The message is encoded for its transmission, and subsequently decoded for its reception. And interference, like poor quality reception from the radio, is ‘noise’.

In terms of heritage value and meaning, it is embodied by a medium that passes on those values to people, groups, and/or communities. The radio does not create the meaning, it is simply the site at which the communication is passed on. The song is not embedded in the radio but it possesses qualities that make it possible for the song to be heard, for some communications to be passed on, and changes to those qualities affect the way in which the communication is received. Sometimes, the extent to which the qualities embedded in a specific radio are required for a wavelength, at times meaning that the radio should be changed if the message starts to distort.

There may be multiple, simultaneous transmissions, and encodings of messages or values that are passed on through heritage, and there may be multiple interpretations as different people or communities decode those values and messages. However, a medium is still required to do this, whether tangible or intangible. Something, whether a dance or a song, a castle or a book, is required to embody and transmit those values and messages. Consequently, the messages and the medium need to be identified, a distinction which is as important as whether a site is considered ‘tangible’ or ‘intangible’.

The cycle of systematic replacement of material at the Ise Grand Shrine means that some values, such as religious practice, design, and symbolic values, can be embodied and communicated by the site. The noise affecting this discourse would be the poor condition of the fabric and the loss of information about the structure. The way the shrine can be used is the same as it was in 690 AD, but scientific examination of the wood will not reveal cultural information beyond 20 years. Over generations, the site embodies and transmits certain kinds of value that are best communicated with a pristine environment and transferred craft skills.

Conversely, early conservation plans for Rouse Hill meant that historical facts could be communicated, but not the feeling of a living house nor an idea of the colors and surfaces that surrounded the family that lived there. However, the focus on a particular kind of interpretation of the message left conservation efforts with a very challenging task of eliminating change to vulnerable material in an aggressive environment. This is an unsustainable task that has not given the Trust the opportunity to moderate the impact of the environment (Scott, 2010).

Considering the model as a long-term perspective, rather than a single stage, allows one to examine the repercussions of Rouse Hill’s original conservation policy. Within a generation, significant change to the fabric has undermined the capacity of the site to be viewed as a record of family life or to be studied. Consequently, important messages could not be communicated through the medium, and it was likely that this loss was likely to continue since the emphasis was so focused on the medium rather than what the medium could embody. The varied response of

Figure 6 Shannon & Weaver’s model of communication (1949, p. 5). From The Mathematical Theory of Communication (copyright 1949, 1998, Board of Trustees University of Illinois). Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.
materials in the house to their environment means that gaps would appear in the collection, which means that the integrity of the unedited archive becomes undermined (Scott, 2010).

As the process continues, the values and messages passed on are reinforced by the kind of embodiment. The house could only be valued in certain ways once the condition had been affected. Changes to the site affect what is communicated, and changes to what is transmitted affect how the medium of embodiment is used in the future.



Elaborating on the model

It is still a simplification to suggest that the practice of heritage ends when it reaches an ‘audience’, who are not passive receptors but active participants in the performance of heritage (Smith, 2006). Furthermore, because a heritage site is intended to last for multiple generations the recipients or consumers of heritage become the meaning makers in this cycle of production and consumption. The model only considers one stage of this cycle, but the situation grows complicated over time. As heritage is passed on to different generations, multiple meanings and multiple audiences are influenced by and influence the transaction between value and site, creating a complex network of interactions. In the case of heritage, this operates as ‘feedback’ by which new values or meanings are encoded and decoded from the same site. This operates through the site and creates a network with new values and discourse, and even new sites, for example, Stonehenge inspiring artists to create lasting works (Fig. 7).

As the transmission relationship over time becomes highly complex, the factors influencing the network, and other sites and discourses, become harder to identify. To return to Stonehenge, Turner’s 1828 depiction (Fig. 3) is a heritage site in itself, a product of the Stonehenge site and the values of that time (including romanticization of the stones). The painting becomes valued as heritage in itself, and even contributed to interpretations of Stonehenge, influencing decisions about the site (so, ultimately, both the historic material and value). Turner’s painting, and also Constable’s painting ‘Stonehenge, Wiltshire’ in 1836 generated public interest in the site, so the fallen stones were romanticized and not considered damage until the turn of the twentieth century (Richards, 2004).

Conclusion

The relationship between site and discourse seems distinct enough when looking at a single point, but heritage cannot be understood by viewing isolated periods. The relationship between the values embodied by heritage and the embodiment itself at a wider level reveals a highly complicated network of interactions between values and embodiments, tangibility, and intangibility. This is not always clearly visible. Basing thoughts only on the material that has survived, as opposed to an understanding of materiality, can lead to misconceptions and division in ideas about how the heritage can and should be managed. It is intended that considering communication models can help express some of the issues discussed.

Heritage sites may have undergone extensive change over time, both physical and interpretative, and this has profound implications for the way these sites are being used, preserved, interpreted, and appreciated. Heritage sites change through their relationship to value and discourse, and vice versa. One consequence of this relationship is that the role of material is not just about the materials present at that site, and their properties, but also how and why they were chosen (or not), and the reasons why they have changed. The social

Figure 7  Shannon and Weaver’s model adapted to the heritage context, with multiple messages (as a radio dial) reaching multiple audiences (who in turn transmit and feedback) through a heritage site that is a representation of another heritage site.
dealings with sites’ material (‘materiality’) is influenced by intangible qualities that impact upon the physical materials and on how long they remain. Long-term perspectives on heritage sites connect, rather than separate, materials and materiality, and so consequently are useful for considering the relationship between sites and values.

The relationship between the values embodied by the heritage sites, and the embodiment itself in a broader perspective, reveals a very complex interaction between the values and the sites, tangibility and intangibility. This is not always effectively characterized and nuanced in international charters or policy discourse concerning heritage, as dichotomous distinctions can over-look interplay between site and discourse over time. Categorizations such as ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’, or ‘East’ and ‘West’, could potentially lead to misconceptions and disagreement when it comes to perceptions of how cultural heritage should be managed. Arguments that emphasize material over values, or vice versa, deny the profound relationship between these components, even if one of them is not visible or prominent at a given time. Depicting conservation approaches as connected to either materials or values alone diminishes this complexity found in all countries and kinds of heritage, and reinforces divisions. Acknowledging this can help make choices in conservation treatment that are sensitive to the context.

Examining heritage and heritage sites over time can help us understand how we can best negotiate the ways in which heritage values can be embodied. Considering conservation in the broader context of heritage can provide an insight into the part conservation plays in that communicative practice, and its role in mediating those values over time. Understanding the role they play and the influences they have on one another requires unpacking the issues a little. However, it is worth considering the relationship between the message and the medium – and what might be possible in the future in terms of how value will be, and can be, embodied.

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