Title: Negotiating authentic objects and authentic selves: beyond the deconstruction of authenticity

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Negotiating authentic objects and authentic selves: beyond the deconstruction of authenticity

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Abstract:

Our understanding of authenticity in the material world is characterised by a problematic dichotomy between materialist and constructivist perspectives. Neither explains why people find the issue of authenticity so compelling, nor how it is experienced and negotiated in practice. There is strong evidence supporting the view that prevailing materialist approaches to authenticity are a product of the development of modernity in the West. The result has been an emphasis on entities and their origins and essences. However, when we look at how people experience and negotiate authenticity through objects, it is the networks of relationships between people, places and things which appear to be central, not the things in themselves. I argue that these inalienable relationships between objects, people and places underpin the ineffable, almost magical, power of authenticity, and explain why people employ it as a means to negotiate their place in a world characterised by displacement and fragmentation. I illustrate this by drawing on ethnographic research surrounding the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab.

Keywords: authenticity, heritage, conservation, identity, place, modernity.

Broadly speaking, authenticity refers to the quality of being authentic, that is, real, original, truthful, or genuine; 'really proceeding from its stated source' (Oxford English Dictionary 2002: 153). It plays a significant part in many spheres of cultural practice and various aspects of our lives. Not least of these is the historic environment, where authenticity haunts the practices of preservation, curation, management and presentation enacted on monuments, buildings, places and artefacts. Until recently, approaches to authenticity in heritage management and conservation have been characterised by an overwhelmingly materialist perspective. Authenticity is seen as an objective and measurable attribute inherent in the material fabric, form and function of artefacts and monuments, and a positivist set of research methods and criteria have evolved to test their genuineness. Furthermore, these approaches still lie at the heart of heritage conservation and management. In contrast, much recent academic writing outside of the heritage management and conservation sectors has been devoted to exploring the complexity of authenticity and its cultural construction (e.g. Bruner 2007; Gable and Handler 2007; Lowenthal 1992, 1995; Handler 1986; Holtorf and Schadla-Hall 1999; Lindholm 2008; Smith 2006). One of the main thrusts of this diverse literature is that authenticity is not inherent in the object. Rather, it is a quality that is culturally constructed and varies according to who is observing the object and in what context. Objects, and indeed intangible dimensions of culture, become embedded in regimes of meaning and exchange, such as those framing heritage conservation and management (Handler and Gable 1997; Holtorf 2005; Phillips 1997), heritage tourism (Bruner 2005; Stanley 1998), and the international art market (Errington 1988; Spooner 1986; Sylvanus 2007). Experts in various guises – connoisseurs, dealers, art historians, archaeologists, conservators and heritage managers – also actively produce and negotiate these regimes of value, thus mediating the authenticity of specific objects (Holtorf 2005; Macdonald 1997; Phillips 1997; Spooner 1986). The commoditisation of culture is also seen as a central issue, both encouraging the active construction of authenticity and paradoxically undermining it through the 'staging' or sale of culture (Cohen 1988; Dicks 2003: 30-32; MacCannell 1973;

1999). Finally, for many recent researchers, the concept of authenticity has been central to the creation of timeless, national, folk cultures (Handler 1986), and 'primitive', non-western, cultures (Clifford 1988; Errington 1998).

Much of this recent work has been fruitful and enlightening. Nevertheless, we are left with a dichotomy that is rooted in the Western philosophical tradition. On the one hand there is the materialist approach, still widely employed in heritage conservation, which treats authenticity as a dimension of 'nature' with real and immutable characteristics that can be identified and measured. On the other hand there is the constructivist position, popular amongst academics and cultural critics, who see authenticity as a product of 'culture', or to be precise the many different cultures through which it is constructed. Yet, in research associated with the latter position there tends to be little concern with materiality, leaving material culture firmly in the domain of the materialist approach. Having situated authenticity as a cultural construct, it is as if layers of authenticity can be simply wrapped around *any* object irrespective of its unique history and materiality. The argument that 'visitors to archaeological sites or museums experience authenticity and aura in front of originals to exactly the same degree as they do in front of very good reproductions or copies – as long as they do not know them to be reproductions or copies' (Holtorf 2005: 118) exemplifies the cultural constructivist stance. It is undoubtedly the case that replicas can acquire authentic qualities (Hall 2006; Holtorf and Schadla-Hall 1999; Holtorf 2005; Pye 2001), but the important question is how and why some become more powerful loci of authenticity than others. Furthermore, to what extent is their authenticity a product of their physical state and material substance?

Above all, it can be argued that we have focused on construction and representation at the expense of exploring the continuing powerful role of authenticity in people's social lives. In its most extreme forms the cultural constructivist approach seems intent on debunking a 'risible' and 'futile' quest for authenticity (e.g. Lowenthal 1992: 189), as if having exposed it people will be less inclined to be duped. However, recent research examining the relationship between objects, sites and places, and the production of emotions, identities and values, has shown that this is not the case (e.g. Bagnall 2003; Dicks 2000, 2003; Jones 2005a, 2005b; Macdonald 1997, 2002; Samuel 1994; Smith 2006). People work with objects and places to develop and strengthen social networks and relationships in a meaningful way. We need a means to understand the powerful, almost primordial, discourses that are invoked by the authenticity or 'aura' of old things; discourses that often draw on material qualities of stone and soil, roots and nourishment, and which ultimately seem involved in working out genuine or truthful relationships between objects, people and places. We need to ask, why people find ideas of authenticity so compelling and what social practices and relationships these ideas sustain. We also need to return to the materiality of objects, sites and places; an aspect that has been rather neglected by constructivist critiques, and indeed much of the recent research focusing on the experience of heritage.

For the rest of this article I wish to explore these issues. I will look at how both materialist and constructivist approaches have developed historically, exploring their links to the rise of modernity and new conceptions of the individual. It will be argued that authenticity is linked to some of modernity's defining practices such as categorisation, the production of order, and purification. Yet alongside these practices, I argue that the experience and negotiation of authenticity also relates to networks of relationships between objects, people and places. I will then draw on my own fieldwork surrounding the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab to explore the ways in which these dual processes operate in practice and how people use authenticity to negotiate their own place in a world characterised by displacement.

Setting the scene – the certainties and relativisation of heritage authenticity

In heritage conservation and management, the term authenticity has been associated with the notion of the 'original' and the 'genuine' (Pye 2001:58-9). The overwhelming emphasis until very recently has been on the integrity or 'true' nature of objects defined in relation to their origins, fabric, and the intentions of their makers (Clavir 2002: xxi). An authentic historical object or building is thus one that is true to its origins in terms of its date, material, form, authorship, workmanship, and, in many cases, its primary context and use. A range of techniques and methods has been marshalled to test for authenticity, which in varying degrees involve investigation of an object's interior space or substance. Dating plays a central role in establishing origins, and authorship is another important facet in assessing the authenticity of an object or building. This might be a broad cultural authorship, determined by context, form and style, or it might be more specific in terms of a particular school of art or architecture, or even a particular artist or architect. Here connoisseurship and historical expertise play a role in establishing the identity of the school, artist, or author (Phillips1997; Talley1996: 33-6).

The structure and composition of an object, building, artefact, or work of art has been central to the way in which conservators and material scientists approach authenticity (Pye 2001: 65). Various techniques are used to examine both the surface of materials and their internal structure, ranging from observations with the naked eye, to different kinds of magnification and use of ultra-violet light, chemical tests and x-rays (Phillips 1997). A critical aspect of this analysis, involves distinguishing between the original materials and subsequent renovations, additions, revisions, and adhesions, intentional or otherwise. With the traditional emphasis on originality, later additions have tended to be regarded as less authentic than original materials.

Finally, context and use are important factors in establishing authenticity. With regard to archaeological objects their date, provenance, function and meaning may be established through the context in which they are found. Objects that are found in primary contexts are often deemed more authentic than those from secondary ones. This is reinforced when objects, monuments, or works of art, which were specifically designed for one context, are found or displayed in another (Foster 2001). The primary use of an object has often been privileged by a concern with authenticity, and those that maintain some aspect of their primary function are often deemed more authentic.

Despite the emphasis on origins, another important strand of thought emphasising the dynamic social lives of objects and monuments has been in evidence since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The Victorian Anti-Scrape movement led by Ruskin and Morris held that authenticity lies in the sequence of developments associated with buildings or monuments; a palimpsest that should not be tampered with except for essential repairs (Lowenthal 1995: 129; Stanley Price et al. 1996: 309-11). Nevertheless, with the ratification of the *Venice Charter* in 1964, a respect for authenticity in the sense of the 'genuine', the 'original', uncontaminated by intrusions of another age, held sway (Pye 2001: 58; Stovel 1995). The same emphasis also underlay the development of UNESCO's 'test for authenticity' as a key tool in evaluating nominations for the World Heritage List (McBryde 1997: 94). The *Operational Guidelines* specify that each property should 'meet the test of authenticity in design, material, workmanship or setting and in the case of cultural landscapes their distinctive character and components'. Furthermore, in practice, this has meant a strong

emphasis on original material, workmanship, and function, even though a palimpsest approach is adopted in relation to design (Cleere 1995). It is only over the last two decades, that western approaches to heritage conservation have been seriously challenged by alternative perspectives, in particular those that highlight the importance of intangible qualities, meanings and values. This is reflected in the debates surrounding recent national and international heritage charters and conventions, e.g. the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (see Smith and Akagawa 2009). However, it is the 1994 Nara Conference on Authenticity that is most pertinent to this discussion.

The Nara Conference was at the heart of a flurry of debates in the mid 1990s, and is regarded as a turning point in approaches to authenticity in mainstream heritage conservation and management (McBryde 1997; Starn 2002). The main impetus stemmed from a concern that the concept of authenticity underpinning the *World Heritage Convention* privileges Western, monumental forms of heritage, and predominantly those constructed with stone. Jokilehto (1995), Lowenthal (1995) highlighted the historical and cultural contingency of the concept of authenticity. Others emphasized a diverse range of cultural approaches to authenticity (e.g. Ito 1995; Mitchell 1995), including the Japanese tradition of dismantling and renovating wooden, historic, religious buildings, ultimately replacing most of the original wood.

Thus authenticity was relativised in a manner reflecting recent academic trends, where it is seen as a product of diverse, culturally specific regimes of meaning and value. This was reinforced by the adoption of *The Nara Document on Authenticity*, which emphasises that:

> All judgements about values attributed to heritage as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgements of value and authenticity on fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that cultural heritage must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which it belongs.
>
> (Article 11)

For Larsen (1995: xiii), the Conference's scientific co-ordinator, this represented a shift away from 'a Eurocentric approach to a post-modern position characterized by recognition of cultural relativism'. Nevertheless, there is still a strong emphasis on universal value in the Nara *Proceedings*, and 'the need for practical tools to measure *the wholeness, the realness, the truthfulness of the site* on which they [conservators] work to improve the effectiveness of proposed treatments' (Stovel 1995: 396, my emphasis). Furthermore, the final article of the *Nara Document* returns to a largely traditional set of criteria for authenticity, namely 'form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling' (Article 13). Thus, the principles at the core of previous understandings of authenticity were perpetuated, and Larsen's (1995: xiii) suggestion that we have escaped a Eurocentric and ultimately modernist approach can be questioned.

Authenticity and modernity – entities and essences within

> An enduring image of modernist anxiety is that the world we inhabit is no longer authentic.
>
> (Gable and Handler 2007: 320)

A number of recent studies of authenticity have suggested that its character, prominence, and even the very concept itself, are peculiar in some way to the modern western world (e.g. MacCannell 1973; Handler 1986; Lindholm 2008; Lowenthal 1995; Trilling 1972). In the Middle Ages, people held things to be authentic, because those with authority validated them as such, or because the things themselves demonstrated supernatural powers (Lowenthal 1995: 125-6). Sacred relics, for instance, were authenticated by the Church, and by virtue of their ability to beget miracles, not by proving their origins or provenance (ibid: 127). By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, there was a growing concern with detecting the forgeries proliferating in the burgeoning antiquities market. New methods for establishing the genuineness of antiquities emerged, valuing objective observation and experimentation over received opinion (Jaffé 1992).

To understand why authenticity takes on a new meaning, and arguably a heightened significance, in the modern era, a number of scholars have explored its connection to the rise of modernity and changing relationships between the individual and society. Most take Trilling's (1972) seminal work on *Sincerity and Authenticity* as their starting point. Trilling proposes that a pre-occupation with sincerity, the absence of dissimulation, feigning or pretence, became central to moral life in European societies from the early modern era (ibid: 2). Furthermore, he suggests, the concern with sincerity is a product of the break-down of feudalism, with its taken for granted, cosmically defined, social order (ibid. 26-7). The extreme revision of previous modes of communal organization, increased social mobility, and urbanisation, meant that 'people were no longer quite sure where they belonged, what their futures held for them, or who their neighbours were' (Lindholm 2008: 3). The possibilities for guile, deceit and falsehood expanded and 'in this ambiguous social milieu it is not surprising that sincerity, doing what one says one will do, became a desired trait' (ibid: 4). However, following Trilling, most subsequent authors suggest that the emphasis on sincerity was driven by a moral concern with the importance of maintaining honest social relationships. In contrast, the modern concept of authenticity, whilst closely related, 'has to do with our true self, our individual existence, not as we might present it to others, but as it "really is", apart from any roles we play' (Handler 1986: 3). The rise of this concern with the inner self has been traced by some to earlier developments, such as the Protestant Reformation and European voyages of discovery, which resulted in intense efforts to 'ratify the Western experience as somehow absolute and true' (Lindholm 2008: 4-5). Whatever the precise factors and influences involved, and it is likely a complex assortment, the important point here is that a new inward-looking notion of authenticity emerged in the modern era. Furthermore, this was linked to forms of social and physical dislocation on a grand scale, and new ideas about the individual.

During the Middle Ages, the person was conceived as indivisible from God's cosmos, permeated by the properties of specific places, and influenced by contact with unseen features of the world (Fowler 2004: 12-13). With the rise of scientific reason, however, there was increasing emphasis on the person as an individual unit distinct from the world (ibid; also Thomas 2004). Sincerity and authenticity became important with the development of the idea of the individual as a fixed and bounded entity, with a unique individuality, and internal essence. Yet, this did not just apply to persons, it also applied to the objects making up the world. Just as scientific reason constructed individual persons as discrete bounded entities, objects also became conceived in such a way, and like persons their individuality and their internal essence became a focus of investigation. The question of whether an object is what it is purported to be, something akin to sincerity, became important. But equally, and with greater significance over time, the question of the authenticity of the object, whether it is

original, real and genuine, came to rest on investigations into the essence of the object, as opposed to surface appearance. Materials analysis epitomises modernist notions of authenticity engaging with the very fabric of the object, establishing the origin and nature of its interior, looking beyond the surface to see what it 'truly is'. Societies, nations, and tribes, also became considered as discrete, bounded entities, each with a unique individual character or essence. Thus, in the modern ontology of nature (Handler 1986, after Cassirer 1932), in which every object or thing is seen as a special centre of activity and individuality, discourses of authenticity seek to establish that:

> Authentic objects, persons and collectives are original, real and pure; they are what they purport to be, their roots are known and verified, their essence and appearance are one.
>
> (Lindholm 2008: 2)

A concern with the authenticity of objects, persons and collective social entities lies at the heart of many post-enlightenment cultural institutions and academic disciplines. Museums, for instance, are involved in such practices through modes of classification and display in which objects are ordered and heterogeneity expunged (Bennett 1995; Hetherington 1999). The concept of authenticity is integral to these practices, ensuring the purity and the 'reality' of various categories of object through processes of conservation and curation. Until recently, modified, hybrid, and heterogeneous objects have often been considered inauthentic and thus excluded from the pure categories that are conserved and represented. The same processes of purification are generally replicated in the historic environment with the establishment of 'collections' of national monuments that are to be conserved, managed and displayed through processes such as scheduling. Analogous processes are also evident in colonial and national discourses, which construct and represent pure tribes and nations, and, at points in their history, disciplines like anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics have helped to produce these categorical entities. Here too authenticity has helped in the critical process of purification that is central to claims asserting the existence of discrete, bounded, cultures and groups of people (Clifford 1988; Handler 1986; 1988).

Experiencing and negotiating authenticity – networks of people, places and objects

Prevailing discourses of authenticity can thus be seen as a product of the development of Western modernity. It can also be argued that authenticity has been put to work in the pursuit of what Latour (1993) has identified as some of modernity's defining practices, in particular those associated with the production of order, the work of purification, and ultimately the suppression of heterogeneity and hybridity. The problem is that like other post-Enlightenment sciences, the disciplines and technologies intended to identify and sustain authenticity have privileged entities in ways that conceal the relationships and practices that give rise to them. Furthermore, whilst it is important to understand how discourses of authenticity are bound up with modernist ideas about entities and essences, simply deconstructing these discourses and dismissing authenticity as a cultural construct, masks and ignores another important aspect. For when we look at how people experience and negotiate authenticity through objects, it is networks of relationships between people, places and things that appear to be central, not the things in and of themselves.

Ruskin alludes to these relationships, even though he did not specifically make the connection to authenticity:

> [T]he greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, or mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity.
>
> (Ruskin 1849: 233-4)

Buildings thus receive their voicefulness from the marks left by successive generations. It is this that gives them substance and life, and which, for Ruskin, is destroyed by an excessive concern with the authenticity of the original source and its restoration. In his exploration of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin (1969) also emphasises the importance of an object's unique history and relationships: '[t]he authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to the history which it has experienced' (ibid: 221). The uniqueness and authenticity of a work of art is inseparable from the thoroughly alive and changeable fabric of tradition in which it is embedded. This testimony to tradition, and the relationships it entails, constitutes an object's 'aura', and for Benjamin aura is eliminated by techniques of mechanical reproduction, such as photography, which detach an object from the domain of tradition.

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

Macdonald's (1997, 2002) application of the concept of inalienable possessions to heritage objects is useful here. Inalienable possessions involve the paradox of keeping while giving, so that even while they enter into systems of social relations and exchange they are imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable qualities of previous owners (Weiner 1992). In her analysis of the Aros Heritage Centre in Skye, Macdonald (1997: 174) argues that heritage is just such an inalienable possession. Building on this, I suggest that the authenticity of heritage objects is bound up in the intrinsic and ineffable qualities not just of past owners, but all of the past experiences, people, and places with which they have been connected. It is this inalienability which continually pushes against the modernist inclination to cut such relationships by locating authenticity in the interior space and origins of objects. These inalienable relationships inform the 'aura' or authenticity of objects, and refuse to be silenced by the modernist emphasis on entities and essences. In this manner authenticity can provide a kind of historical and cosmological authentication (cf. Weiner 1992: 9), because it is about acknowledging and working out the inalienable relationships between objects, people and places. In their illuminating ethnographic studies, Macdonald (1997) and Dicks (2000) have shown how such networks of relationships are crucial to the experience and negotiation of authenticity and how this varies according to where particular people are situated within these networks. For instance, at the Rhondda Heritage Park, Dicks (2000: 220-9) shows that

visitors' experiences of the site are informed by their different degrees of personal investment in, and cultural proximity to, the history presented, because these factors impact on their ability to make connections and situate themselves in relation to the narratives they encounter. Nevertheless, Macdonald and Dicks' research focuses on heritage centres and exhibition techniques rather than historical objects and there materiality. Thus in the following section, I focus on a particular monument to further illustrate the processes involved in the experience of authenticity.

Negotiating authentic selves and authentic objects – the case of Hilton of Cadboll

In 2001 the long lost lower section of the late 8th century Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab was rediscovered by archaeologists excavating at the medieval chapel site adjacent to the village of Hilton of Cadboll in Easter Ross, north-east Scotland (Figure 1). This lower section had remained *in situ* after the massive upper section fractured off, probably during a freak storm recorded in 1674 (Foster and Jones 2008: 217). The subsequent biography of the upper section is complex, and here there is only scope for a brief summary (see Foster and Jones 2008 for a full discussion). Its cross-face was dressed off in the seventeenth century to make way for a burial memorial dating to 1676, and in the process thousands of fragments were created. The upper section with its new inscription was then apparently abandoned at the site and rediscovered in the late eighteenth century by antiquarians seeking to document the national antiquities of Scotland. In the 1860s, it was removed by the laird of Cadboll Estate, and erected alongside the driveway of his main residence, Invergordon Castle. In 1921 his son offered the upper section to the British Museum and it was transported to London. However, an orchestrated protest against its removal from Scotland secured its return within the year, whereupon it was placed in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. Subsequently it has been relocated to the new Museum of Scotland, where it occupies a prominent position in the 'Early People' gallery (Figure 2). Meanwhile, in Easter Ross local interest in the monument led to a reconstruction project resulting in a full-scale carving of the monument, which was erected adjacent to the remains of the medieval chapel in Hilton of Cadboll in 2000 (see Figure 3 below). Even the bare bones of this biography hint at the rich web of significance surrounding the monument relating to class, taste, and nation, in which discourses of authenticity are never far from the surface. So it is perhaps not surprising that the unearthing of the lower section in 2001, within 50m of the modern reconstruction, acted as a catalyst, placing authenticity at the heart of renewed debates relating to ownership, identity, and place. In what follows I draw on ethnographic and interview-based research carried out between 2001 and 2003 (names of interviewees cited in the text are pseudonyms).

[Figure 1: The lower section of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab in situ during excavation at the Hilton of Cadboll chapel (photograph the author).]

[Figure 2: The upper section of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab on display in the Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh (photograph by the author with kind permission of the National Museums of Scotland).]

There is no question that the upper section of the famed cross-slab has been regarded as a genuine early medieval Pictish masterpiece since the mid-nineteenth century (see Foster and Jones 2008: 223-32). Furthermore, its authenticity is stamped with the authority of the Museum of Scotland, where it has been subject to art historical and scientific research, as well as embedded in an explicit national narrative. In this context the object is treated as a distinct, bounded entity and its original form, meaning and use is privileged (Jones 2005a: 96-100).

For instance, the seventeenth century burial memorial is largely ignored in the exhibition; visitors are physically deterred from viewing the burial inscription by the way the cross-slab is placed, and there is no reference to it in the associated text panel. In terms of its display, the authenticity of the object is firmly attached to its origins, and the object is presented as a genuine and representative example of a particular category of Pictish symbol-bearing early Christian art. Nevertheless, despite the modernist emphasis on the object as a distinct entity divorced from its subsequent biography, the networks of relationships it embodies refuse to be entirely silenced. For instance, whilst masked by modes of classification and display, the monument's complex history of ownership, and particularly its brief sojourn in London, informs the ways in which curators view it and the value they place on it (Foster and Jones 2008: 260; Jones 2005b). Museum visitors also negotiate relationships with it and in the process attempt to authenticate their own experience and identity; some by reference to similar monuments in their localities, others through association with the region that it derives from (Foster and Jones 2008: 261).

The lower section was rapidly authenticated following its discovery in 2001; its material fabric, dimensions and design informing a correspondence of identity with the larger section on display in the Museum. Indeed, the Scottish State, through the remit of the Queen's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, has recognised this correspondence of identity, attributing legal ownership of the lower section to the National Museums of Scotland on the basis that it is an integral part of an object already held in its collections (Clarke and Foster 2008: 9). The authenticity of its setting was less straightforward as it was found in a secondary context, leading to questions over its original location and physical setting. However the excavation itself provided an arena in which these aspects of its authenticity could be negotiated, through a variety of techniques: thermo-luminescence and radiocarbon dating, investigation of stratigraphy and archaeological context, and analysis of the physical fractures and modifications evident on the lower section itself (see James 2008). As Yarrow (2003) has argued, the authenticity of the excavated object is thus created through a set of processes and practices that enact a separation from the subjectivity of those excavating.

However, for those who engaged with the lower section during its excavation in 2001 – field archaeologists, heritage managers, local residents and passing tourists – the object seemed to possess a magical, almost numinous, aura, which was produced through their own and others' relationships with it. For many of the people who witnessed it being unearthed there was an ineffable sense of connection with the people who had erected it in that place and touched it in the past. This was a powerful aspect for some of the excavators who experienced close physical contact with the lower section and the deposits surrounding it. Furthermore, onlookers excluded from the professional domain of the excavation itself often expressed a strong desire to touch it, as if this would achieve some magical communion with the past:

> … they were excavating all round it for a few weeks and I didn't ask anyone because I thought it would be stupid […] but the one thing I really wanted to do was just to touch it, put my hands on it. […] I think we were connected with it, going back down the years they were connected with it.
>
> (Interview with Duncan 2001)

There was also a strong proclivity among local residents to see the cross-slab itself as a living thing; 'an ancient member of the community', something that was 'born' and 'grew', and which has a 'soul'. Through this they explored relationships of belonging and feelings of

attachment that evoked powerful primordial sentiments. As Màiri, a woman in her 40s who was born and brought up in Hilton, put it:

> When I was up on the [excavation viewing] platform there on Saturday and looking down on it […] I was able to see it, and the fact [she laughs] it's in there, it's in the earth and it's been there for so long […] you actually feel for it, you have a feeling for it. I can't put it any other way. It's part of your culture and therefore it's part of the people, its part of the community.
>
> (Interview with Màiri, 2001)

And she went on to explain that 'it's almost like being attached to rocks or the sea or it's always been here, it's [been] part of the place for generations'; rocks and the sea being elements that she had previously described as part of the birth of the earth. For many, such ideas and metaphors informed the authenticity of the lower section of the cross-slab and, by virtue of it, the monument as a whole. Thus, regardless of archaeological evidence demonstrating that the lower section was not in its primary context, they felt that it was 'born' in Hilton, and like people it should go back where it 'belongs'. Furthermore, the authenticity of the various fragments of the cross-slab, in part, depend on their association with soil or place; a few interviewees felt that the lower section was 'alive' in the ground, in contact with the soil, but once it was excavated it became 'just a cold deal stone', whereas for others, the important factor in terms of the 'life' of the monument is physical association with Hilton of Cadboll.

Such discourses were a prominent aspect in negotiating the authenticity of the lower section at Hilton of Cadboll, in contrast to the upper section in the Museum of Scotland. They also provided a means for people to negotiate their own authenticity, through the depth of feeling they have for the stone, and the range of connections they can demonstrate to it. A number of local residents publicly recounted the actions and experiences of their grandparents who had talked about it, or even great grandparents who had witnessed the upper section as children, when it was still at the Hilton of Cadboll chapel. Thus, negotiating the authenticity of the lower section in local contexts was about eliciting its connections to people and place by locating it in a network of real and putative kin relationships, which allow differentiation between 'locals' and 'incomers' (see Jones 2005b). In this respect, the experience of authenticity is not about its date, original setting, design, or material fabric in the sense of its geological make-up; it is about networks of relationships between people, objects and places (and see Dicks 2000). However, this is not purely located in the realm of the social; it is also about the cross-slab's materiality and its physical and metaphorical connections to soil, rocks, sea, people and communities, in the past and present. The location of the cross-slab is an inseparable aspect of its authenticity from such a perspective. If authenticity is negotiated through relationships between people, objects and places then removal to museums or any other form of relocation produces a problematic dislocation. For Janet, another local resident, even lifting the lower section, conserving it and putting it back takes something away from it: 'something is lost […] I mean I would like to think gosh that's been there for so many hundred years, nobody has actually, they've maybe touched it, but nobody has actually moved that in all those years'.

There is a further aspect of the physical and social landscape that made this monument particularly instructive in terms of authenticity; the full-scale reconstruction towering next to the excavation trench (see Figure 3). The presence of this monolith threw the issue of authenticity into starker relief. It had been commissioned in the mid-1990s following a failed

request to the National Museums of Scotland for the repatriation of the original upper section. Barry Grove, a sculptor who had produced reconstructions of Pictish stones for heritage settings, was commissioned to carve a full-scale reconstruction. Amongst heritage professionals his sculptures are valued for their authentic attributes in terms of material, scale, and workmanship. Nevertheless, when it was erected in 2000 at the Hilton of Cadboll chapel site, a scheduled monument and a Historic Scotland Property in Care, these apparently authentic qualities aroused considerable anxiety about the relationship between its role in representing something old and its intrinsic essence as something modern. With a few years of weathering, could it be mistaken for the original by passing visitors? What of future generations? In other words, might its appearance come to suggest something other than what it really is – a late 20th century reconstruction? Such fears, regularly voiced by heritage professionals, were partly allayed by its concrete setting, a date inscribed in its tenon, and the erection of public information boards. However, at the time of the excavation only the face depicting the famous hunting scene had been carved with several designs under consideration for the remaining face. With the rediscovery of many of the original fragments, dressed off the stone in the seventeenth century, the authenticity of the design for the cross-face also became a source of concern amongst professionals. Should the sculptor wait for an authorised scholarly interpretation of the design? Should the reconstruction only contain what is known from the recovered fragments? How much artistic license should there be?

[Figure 3: The reconstruction of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, adjacent to the chapel site, with the 2001 excavations in the background (photograph the author).]

For non-professionals, the presence of the reconstruction, juxtaposed surreally against the excavation trench, also raised questions of authenticity. For some, mainly passing tourists, the presence of the original lower section cast the reconstruction with an air of stark inauthenticity. The original was described as having a 'soul' in contrast to the reconstruction which was seen as a soulless modern copy, lacking the patina of age and the aura of some ineffable contact with past people and events. However, the reaction of many residents of Hilton and surrounding villages was more nuanced. The original lower section had a powerful aura for them, just as it did for passing tourists. Nevertheless, the reconstruction also had authentic qualities. It had been carved in the village of Hilton of Cadboll over a period of 14 months during 1998 and 1999. The studio had been a regular haunt for many who called in to see the sculpture develop and to pass the time of day in conversation with the artist and others who had gathered. In this context, relationships between people, object, and place had been forged, to the extent that many felt that the reconstruction 'belonged' to Hilton. Indeed, some transferred the same anthropomorphic metaphors to the reconstruction that they did to the original. It had been 'born' in Hilton and they had seen it 'grow' and this attributes it a form of authenticity.

This desire to make connections between monument, people and place can be illustrated further in relation to the cross-face design. Whilst some local residents, in keeping with the professionals, thought the design should include a cross in the style of Pictish early Christian art, others suggested that it should include more recent historical and contemporary developments affecting the monument and the community. As one interviewee, Alan, explained, the first side is just a 'copy' of the original, but the other side should be 'genuine', reflecting 'the time between the time of the Picts and modern times [with depictions of fishing boats, oil rigs and so forth] because that makes it more of a living stone than a copy of a stone'. However, it is also the physical connections created with the very materiality of the object that inform its authenticity. As we have seen above, touch is central to this, providing a

physical connection to the object and the people it has been associated with. A particularly evocative expression of this desire for material connection, are the stories I was told about people collecting pieces of the waste debitage from the studio floor to keep in their homes and even send to relatives abroad. Indeed I was even shown one of these fragments sitting in pride of place in the living room of one interviewee. I suggest that here people are using the material fragments of the reconstruction as a means re-establish relationships between monument, people and place. Furthermore, by sending the fragments to relatives in the diaspora, they are attempting to reintegrate and authenticate historically fragmented communities.

In previous work, I have argued that much of the significance attached to the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab in local contexts relates to the dislocation of people and places produced by the Highland Clearances, which remain a particularly prominent aspect of social memory (Jones 2005a; also Basu 2006). If authenticity is bound up with the networks of relationships between people, places and things, then a concern with it will likely be exaggerated in cultural contexts where people have experienced forms of dislocation and displacement. Such experiences have been commonplace in the modern era, and as discussed above some authors have made historical connections between such processes and an increased concern with authenticity. However, whilst these authors have stressed that the characteristic modern concern with authenticity is one that focuses on entities and their essences, I suggest that it is also equally about recognising and negotiating networks of relationships. Thus, one of the reasons why authenticity is such a powerful concept is that it provides a means for people to negotiate their own place in a world characterised by population displacement and fragmentation of communities; it is in this sense about *reconnecting* objects, people and places.

Conclusions: purification, hidden networks and inalienable relationships

I began this article by highlighting a problematic dichotomy between materialist and constructivist approaches to authenticity. Materialist approaches are founded on the assumption that authenticity is integral to objects, and that it is dependent on them being true to their origins in terms of material, design, production, and use. Thus, authenticity is deemed to be a measurable objective attribute that can be subject to a battery of investigations and tests, which are routinely employed in conserving and curating objects and monuments. Much recent academic research, in contrast, has argued that authenticity is a cultural construct, and objects become embedded in regimes of value in which authenticity depends as much on the observer's gaze as the object of that gaze. However, having rejected the materialist approach, this leaves us with a poor understanding of the impact of the materiality of objects on the construction and negotiation of authenticity. Furthermore, such work fails to explain the powerful, often primordial, discourses that are bound up in people's experience and negotiation of authenticity in respect to specific objects and monuments.

Undoubtedly, the materialist approaches that have prevailed in heritage conservation are thoroughly imbued with a modernist atomistic concern with the essence of things (Handler 1986; Kingston 1999). Furthermore, 'in terms of the experience of a particular Euro-American form of modernity, heritage meets the need to salvage an essential, authentic sense of 'self' from the debris of modern estrangement' (Rowlands 2002: 106). The decline of feudalism, mass-population movements, and the rise of scientific rationalism, led to new forms of social relations and new conceptions of the individual self as a discrete, autonomous entity distinct from other entities in the world. With this shift the question of the sincerity and

later the authenticity of a person became an important one. The same scrutiny was applied to objects and collective social groups, the aim being to establish whether they are original, real and pure. However, even though it can thus be argued that authenticity is bound up in some of modernity's defining practices of categorisation and purification, I have argued that it also paradoxically involved in recognising and negotiating networks of inalienable relationships between objects, people and places. In respect to objects it is the relationships embodied by their cultural biographies, from their origins to the present-day, which inform the experience of authenticity and its powerful impact on people's lives (see also Macdonald 1997, 2002). In this way, I have suggested, people use authenticity to work out genuine or truthful relationships between objects, people and places, and this process is heightened by the forms of dislocation and displacement that characterise the modern world.

Kingston (1999: 339) has argued that 'the necessity for authenticity, and the problems that follow from that need, are as primordial as social relations themselves'. Whether or not the concept has such a wide-ranging cross-cultural purchase, there is certainly more to its role in interrogating the genuiness and truthfulness of objects, people, and places, and their relationships with one another, than many recent studies imply. I have suggested that whilst modernity has privileged the notion of an inner essence, identity or substance has been prioritized over changes in attributes and relationships this is by no means all encompassing. The authenticity of objects is experienced and negotiated as a numinous or magical quality that I argue is linked to the networks of inalienable relationships they have been involved in throughout their social lives. In this respect, the use of authenticity can be compared to Latour's (1993) dual practices of purification and translation suggesting that 'we have never been modern'. Nevertheless, the networks of relationships recognised in the negotiation of authenticity are not limitless (cf. Strathern 1996) or treated with equal value. They vary according to who is engaging with a particular object in what context. Thus for Duncan who, as we heard earlier, just wanted to touch the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab:

> It wouldn't mean so much to me, because the ancestral part of it wouldn't be there, I couldn't connect, if I lived somewhere else, and if my forefathers had lived somewhere else and I just came to Hilton and I went and touched it, it would be an amazing thing to see but it wouldn't be part of me because nobody I knew or none of my relatives that are gone would have had any part of that. But to know that my people were here and that stone is there, just to touch it, you know they must have seen it, they must have touched it you know going back these years, it was like something holy I just, I just needed to touch it.

Some relationships are privileged whilst others are cut, suppressed or lost, with the result that the negotiation of authenticity is frequently a contested process. Indeed, as with primordial discourses, limits are usually placed on the relationships that are deemed authentic, and this is ultimately an exclusionary process associated with the production of power and identity.

This is not the place to explore the practical implications of these arguments. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the conservation and curation of objects we need to find the means to acknowledge how their materiality informs the relationships they embody, and try to find ways to accommodate how people use these relationships to negotiate authentic places for themselves in the world. Handler (1986: 4) has suggested that once authenticated, contact with objects in museums 'allows us to appropriate their authenticity, incorporating that magical proof of existence into what we call our "personal experience"'. However, I suggest that this appropriation depends more on the ability of people to establish relationships with

objects and the networks of people and places they embody through their unique cultural biographies, than it does on the sheer authority of museums. Authenticity is not simply a facet of the internal essence of discrete isolated entities as modernist discourses would have us believe, but rather *a product of the relationships between people and things*. This is why anxieties surrounding the authenticity of objects do not cease once museums and heritage institutions have validated them. For there is always the question of whether the way they are conserved and presented, might undermine their very authenticity by cutting them (and us) off from the unique networks of relationships they embody.

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