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Beyond "Natural" and "Cultural" Heritage: Toward an Ontological Politics of Heritage in the Age of Anthropocene

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Abstract
The critique of the separation of natural and cultural heritage is now well established. Rather than repeat arguments against what many would now acknowledge as an artificial separation, this paper considers the implications of working within the expanded field that is created for heritage when the dissolution of the boundaries between natural and cultural heritage is taken as given. I argue that embracing this dissolution allows us to reorient and reconceptualize heritage. Heritage is understood here as a series of diplomatic properties that emerge in the dialogue of heterogeneous human and non-human actors who are engaged in practices of caring for and attending to the past in the present. As such, heritage functions toward *assembling futures*, and thus might be more productively connected with other pressing social, economic, political, and ecological issues of our time. Indeed, we need not look far to comprehend alternative forms of heritage-making that already model such connectivity ontologies. Fundamental to understanding the value of these alternative heritage ontologies is the recognition of ontological plurality: that *different* forms of heritage practices enact *different* realities and hence work to assemble *different futures*. Following on from this point, I sketch out an ontological politics *of* and *for* heritage—a sense of how heritage could be oriented toward composing "common worlds" or "common futures," while maintaining a sensitivity to the ways in which each domain of heritage relates to a particular mode of existence. At stake here is the acknowledgment that each such mode of existence produces its own *particular worlds* and its own *specific futures*. I do this within the context of a consideration of the implications of the recognition of a certain set of entanglements of culture with nature, the folding together of what we used to term the human and the non-human, which characterizes our contemporary moment. To illustrate these points, I introduce the framework for a new collaborative research

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program, Assembling Alternative Futures for Heritage, which considers the implications of working across an expanded field of heritage practices and attempts to reconfigure the relationship between heritage and other modalities of caring for the future.

Resumen
La crítica de la separación del patrimonio natural y cultural está actualmente bien afianzada. En lugar de presentar argumentos reiterados contra lo que muchos considerarían una separación artificial, en este artículo se tienen en cuenta las implicancias de trabajar dentro del ámbito expandido que se crea para el patrimonio cuando la disolución de los límites entre el patrimonio natural y el cultural se da por descontada. Sostengo que la aceptación de esta disolución nos permite reorientar y reconceptualizar el patrimonio. El patrimonio se entiende aquí como una serie de propiedades diplomáticas que surgen en el diálogo de agentes heterogéneos humanos y no humanos que participan en prácticas de cuidado y atención del pasado en el presente. En consecuencia, el patrimonio funciona hacia la *construcción de futuros*, y por lo tanto, podría estar más conectado productivamente con otros temas sociales, económicos, políticos y ecológicos apremiantes de nuestro tiempo. Ciertamente, no necesitamos mirar muy lejos para comprender las formar alternativas de creación de patrimonio que ya imitan dichas ontologías de conectividad. Para comprender el valor de estas ontologías patrimoniales alternativas es fundamental reconocer la pluralidad ontológica: que las *diferentes* formas de prácticas patrimoniales representan realidades *diferentes* y, por consiguiente, trabajan para armar *futuros diferentes*. Inmediatamente después, resumo una política ontológica *del* patrimonio y *a favor de* este: una opinión sobre cómo el patrimonio podría orientarse a la composición de "mundos comunes" o "futuros comunes" mientras se mantiene una sensibilidad a las formas en las cuales cada campo del patrimonio se relaciona con un modo particular de existencia. Aquí está en juego el reconocimiento de que cada modo de existencia produce sus propios *mundos particulares* y sus propios *futuros específicos*. Planteo esto dentro del contexto de la consideración de las implicancias del reconocimiento de cierto conjunto de entrelazamientos de la cultura con la naturaleza, la fusión de lo que solíamos denominar lo humano y lo no humano, lo cual caracteriza nuestro momento contemporáneo. Para ilustrar estos puntos, presento el marco de un nuevo programa de investigación colaborativa, "Construcción de futuros alternativos para el patrimonio," el cual tiene en cuenta las consecuencias de trabajar en un ámbito extendido de prácticas patrimoniales e intenta reconfigurar la relación entre el patrimonio y otros modos de preocuparse por el futuro.

Résumé
Le fait de critiquer la séparation entre patrimoine culturel et patrimoine naturel est aujourd'hui bien établi. Plutôt que répéter des arguments contre ce que beaucoup considèrent à présent comme une séparation artificielle, cet article examine les implications d'un travail au sein du domaine élargi consacré au patrimoine lorsque la dissolution des frontières entre patrimoine naturel et culturel est considérée comme acquise. Nous défendons l'idée que l'acceptation de cette dissolution nous permet de réorienter et de conceptualiser de manière nouvelle le patrimoine. Le patrimoine est défini ici comme une série de propriétés diplomatiques qui émergent dans le dialogue entre des acteurs hétérogènes humains et non-humains impliqués dans des pratiques actuelles visant à entretenir et se soucier du passé. Comme tel, le patrimoine fonctionne de manière à *assembler des avenirs*, et pourrait de ce fait être relié de façon plus productive à d'autres problématiques sociales, économiques, politiques et écologiques de notre temps. En effet, il n'est pas besoin de chercher loin pour trouver des formes alternatives de fabrication du patrimoine qui illustrent déjà ce genre d'ontologies du lien. Pour comprendre la valeur de ces ontologies alternatives du patrimoine, il est fondamental de reconnaître la pluralité ontologique : *différentes* formes de pratiques patrimoniales font vivre des réalités *différentes* et de ce fait travaillent à assembler des avenirs *différents*. En poursuivant cette pensée, nous esquissons une politique ontologique *du* patrimoine et *pour* le patrimoine, en donnant à voir comment le patrimoine pourrait être orienté vers la composition de « mondes communs » ou d' « avenirs communs », tout en restant sensibles à la manière dont chaque domaine patrimonial est lié à un certain mode d'existence. Ce qui est ici en jeu est de reconnaître que chacun de ces modes d'existence produit ses propres *mondes singuliers* avec ses propres *avenirs spécifiques*. Nous nous plaçons pour cela dans le contexte de l'examen des implications de la reconnaissance d'un certain éventail d'enchevêtrements entre nature et culture, l'association de ce qui était autrefois nommé l'humain et le non-humain, qui caractérise notre époque contemporaine. Pour illustrer ces points, nous introduisons le cadre d'un nouveau programme de recherche collaboratif, « Assembler des avenirs alternatifs pour le patrimoine » qui examine les implications d'un travail traversant le domaine élargi des pratiques patrimoniales et tente de reconfigurer la relation entre patrimoine et autres modes de souci pour l'avenir.

KEYWORDS: ontology, futures, anthropocene, sustainability, heritage naturecultures

Introduction

Over the past few decades, many of the things we have previously taken as "given" in relation to heritage have shifted and fundamentally changed. Where once we were able to imagine that the idea of heritage and the most appropriate ways of managing it might be universal phenomena embodied in various "Western" charters and conventions, various challenges have demolished the idea of heritage as singular and unanimous. Similarly, the idea of natural and cultural heritage as separate domains, representing different forms of value and embodying a broader Cartesian dualism through an insistence on the separation of nature and culture, body and mind, practice and thought, tangible and intangible, has also emerged as untenable.

The sources of these challenges have been multiple, and there have been a number of different pathways that have led many of us to these conclusions. My own insights have been formed in working with Indigenous Australians on a range of different natural and cultural heritage projects over the past two decades, in which the interrelationships between these two bureaucratic categories of heritage have become increasingly clear. This is a pathway I have described in detail in my book *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Harrison 2013), where I discuss the ways in which, for example, "natural" heritage projects focusing on the use of wild resources by Indigenous Australians simultaneously raise questions of economic, social, cultural, and scientific concern. If one holds Wedge-tailed Eagles to be one's kin, then questions of their management touch on more than the values of biodiversity, but are equally concerned with what we might, under existing heritage taxonomies, refer to as "social" or "spiritual" values. Drawing on the work of Deborah Bird Rose (e.g. 2008, 2011), Eduardo Viveiros De Castro (e.g. 2004) and others (e.g. Rose and Robin 2004), I describe this way of understanding heritage in terms of "connectivity ontologies"—modalities of becoming in which life and place combine to bind time and living beings into generations of continuities that work collaboratively to keep the past alive in the present and for the future. Drawing on these alternative ways of understanding heritage, I suggest that rather than taking a social constructivist approach to heritage, as some (e.g., Smith 2006; but see Solli et al. 2011) have done in turning away from the idea of heritage value as universal and inherent, we might instead see heritage as collaborative, dialogical and interactive, a material-discursive process in which past and future arise out of dialogue and encounter between multiple embodied subjects in (and with) the present.

My aim in describing these alternative modes of heritage-making has been to consider the extent to which they might provide windows through which to reconsider the assumptions of the universality and homogeneity of existing, dominant (so called "modern" or "Western") models of heritage. Implicit in my discussion of ontological perspectivism is an acknowledgment of ontological *pluralism*. In taking seriously the claim of a number of different fields of heritage practice to conserve objects, places, and practices "*from* the past, *in* the present, *for* the future," I want to focus attention on the actual future-assembling capacities of different kinds of

heritage practices, beyond the dominant dichotomy of "Western" and "non-Western" forms, to acknowledge the heterogeneity between and across these various domains of practice which undermines and complicates such simple dichotomies (e.g., see Winter 2013, 2014). My aim is to consider possible areas of shared concern among them, while still acknowledging the ways in which different modes of heritage-making are engaged in quite distinctive projects of working toward the production of different pasts and equally different futures. Here I draw on a number of influences including Karen Barad's agential realism (Barad 2007), Michel Foucault's notion of the *dispositif* (Foucault 1977; see Agamben 2009), Deleuzian assemblage theory (De Landa 2006), and various aspects of Science and Technology Studies (e.g., Latour 1998; Law 2004; Law and Urry 2004) in seeing heritage practices of various kinds as enacting new realities through contingent processes of assembling and reassembling bodies, technologies, materials, values, temporalities, and meanings.

Importantly, I want to suggest that the kinds of dialogical relationships with heritage that I described in *Heritage: Critical Approaches* are not simply limited to indigenous peoples, but have broader significance for helping us to understand potential bridges that might be built among heritage and other adjacent fields or domains of practice which touch directly on questions of the relationship between heritage, ecology, sustainability, health, and resilience. But rather than retracing existing arguments about the integration of nature and culture (and by implication, natural and cultural heritage), my aim in this paper is to consider the implications of working within the expanded field that is created for heritage when this dissolution of the boundaries between them is taken as given. Heritage (or rather, "heritage*s*") in this context might be more helpfully defined as a series of diplomatic properties that emerge in the dialogue of heterogeneous human and non-human actors who are engaged in keeping pasts alive in the present, which function toward assembling futures. Rather than providing a cause for concern, I argue that doing so might allow us to reorient and reconceptualize these various fields of heritage so that they might be more productively connected with other pressing social, economic, political, and ecological issues of our time. I have already noted that fundamental to understanding the value of these alternative heritage ontologies is the recognition of ontological plurality, that different forms of heritage practices operate in different ontological fields and hence work to assemble different futures. Following from this point, I begin to sketch an ontological politics *of* and *for* heritage, a sense of how heritage could be oriented toward composing "common worlds" and "common futures," while maintaining a sensitivity to the ways in which different domains of heritage practice relate to different modes of existence (cf. Latour 2013) and thus produce their own worlds and their own specific pasts, presents, and futures. I do so within the context of a consideration of the implications of the recognition of a particular set of entanglements of culture with nature, the folding together of what we used to term the human and the non-human, which characterizes our contemporary moment. I also use this as an opportunity to introduce the framework for a new

collaborative research program, Assembling Alternative Futures for Heritage, which considers the implications of working across an expanded field of heritage practice and reconfiguring the relationships among different forms of heritage practices and other modalities of caring for the future to illustrate my argument.

Dialogical models of heritage and connectivity ontologies

First, I want to reiterate some points I have made elsewhere to make clear what I mean when I make reference to "connectivity ontologies" and dialogical models of heritage. In doing so, I draw closely on material first published in *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Harrison 2013). For Aboriginal Australians, attachments to landscape form the basis for familial connections between humans and other-than-humans. My colleague Deborah Bird Rose has written of the work she undertook for the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) which aimed to explore the widespread concept of indigenous Australian "kinship" and its implications for the work of "natural" heritage management (Harrison and Rose 2010; see also Rose 2003; Rose et al. 2003). The concept of "kinship" for Aboriginal people in New South Wales describes the individual and collective familial relationships which people have with particular plant and/or animal species as part of an overall system that organizes relationships between all sentient beings—both human and non-human—in the world. Anthropologists generally refer to this concept as "totemism." While there are many different variations on the form of totemism throughout Australia and the world, with much variation even in contemporary New South Wales (Rose et al. 2003), individual and group totemism is:

> expressive of a worldview in which kinship is a major basis for all life, in which the natural world and humans are participants in life processes. Relationships are based on the kin-concepts of enduring solidarity, responsibility and care (Rose et al. 2003:3).

One of the implications of this worldview (or "mode of existence" [Latour 2013]) is that humans are connected by bonds of kinship with particular plant and animal species, and with the "natural" environment more generally. This explains why, for them, it is impossible to disentangle the "cultural" from the "natural." Rose uses the term "ecological connectivity" to describe this relationship. This is a term that is more often used in natural heritage management to describe the open space that surrounds ecosystems and links together different ecotones; here the term is broadened to include the "social" relationships between people and the natural world. Central to this mode of existence is the concept of "country." Kinship structures the system of connection among people, group, and country, but country is not only a place or an object; it is also a subject (or "agent") in its own right. Indeed, it is perhaps the most important agent, as it is the source of the overarching principles that govern the world and the people in it. Elsewhere, Rose describes country as a "nourishing

terrain … a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart's ease" (Rose 1996:7).

In a book chapter on which Rose and I subsequently collaborated, exploring the implications of indigenous ontologies for the notion of intangible heritage (Harrison and Rose 2010), we suggest that Indigenous Australian ontologies present a profound challenge to the idea of "intangible" heritage and the definitions of heritage inherent in the World Heritage Convention more generally (see also Rose 2008, 2011). The chapter begins by noting that in its most abstract form, indigenous ontologies destabilize Western anthropocentrism in its treatment of humans as preeminent or separate to "nature." I have already noted the opposition between nature (the non-human) and culture (the human) as one of the underpinning dualisms or what Bruno Latour (1999) terms the "Great Divides" of modern, post-Enlightenment thought. We suggest that within an indigenous ontology in which "culture" is everywhere, not only is there no boundary between nature and culture, there is no mind-matter binary. This contrasts with a modern Cartesian dualism that sees the mind and body as separate, and the mind itself as non-physical. Rather than mind being a strictly human property, leaving matter and nature "mindless," we note that Australian indigenous ontologies hold consciousness and sentience to be widespread among humans and non-humans. To illustrate this point, consider this statement by Phil Sullivan, a Ngiyampaa man and NPWS Aboriginal Sites Officer. He explains:

> The "natural" and "cultural" heritage of National Parks is not separate. This is an artificial white-fella separation. They are still boxing the whole into sections, we need to integrate management into a holistic view of the landscape (Harrison and Rose 2010: 251).

In saying this, Phil and other Indigenous Australians challenge the idea that heritage meaning is made only by humans. Indigenous ontologies challenge the tangible-intangible dichotomy that is fundamental to the definition of intangible heritage. Within this binary structure, we suggest that tangible matter is thought to be made meaningful by being brought into a world of intangible meanings, which are the property of human culture and experience. In contrast, we suggest that indigenous ontologies propose a philosophy of "becoming," in which life and place combine to bind time and living beings into generations of continuities in particular places (Harrison and Rose 2010:250). These generations are not only human; they also involve particular plants and animals, objects, and, indeed, whole ecosystems. These are associated by webs of connection that are not randomly patterned, but which are structured by principles of kinship and that are established as part of the "Law" or "Dreaming."

Another Ngiyampaa man, Paul Gordon, explains the implication of this kinship system for the ways in which land management bureaucracies go about managing and protecting endangered plant and animal species. He uses the term "meat" in

place of "totem" to refer to the "flesh" that one "is" as a result of being a member of a multi-species kin group. He noted:

> Some animals can't just be classified as fauna. Pademelon [a small, kangaroo-like marsupial] is my meat. They are my people, my relations … If National Parks has something going with Pademelons, they should talk with us—it's our family (Harrison and Rose 2010:252).

The implication of this familial relationship with Pademelons is that management decisions which are made with regard to Pademelons will also effect Paul Gordon and other Ngiyampaa people whom Pademelons recognize as kin; similarly, the connection between Pademelons and other plant and animal species may mean that decisions made with regard to their management might also effect other entities which recognize them as kin. This connection between all things (remembering that some "things" that might not conventionally be classed as "living" in post-Enlightenment philosophies might be subjects in their own right, defined as such by their animation with spirit and ability to act on other "persons") makes operating within a system of heritage management that separates natural and cultural heritage not only incredibly frustrating but ultimately impossible for Indigenous Australians.

Heritage after nature/culture: on heritage "naturecultures"

How might we draw on these observations to understand what heritage is and what it does more generally? Recently, we have seen, in discussions as widely dispersed as those of the impacts of humans on the earth's ecological systems; the idea of the Anthropocene as an epoch in which humans have themselves operated as a primary geological force of change; discussions of cybernetics and the increasing integration of humans with machines and their virtual avatars; in animal studies (e.g., Derrida 2008; Haraway 1991, 2003, 2008; Kirksey 2014; Wolfe 2003), and in the so-called "material" and "ontological" turns in the humanities and social sciences, that what we once took for granted as the "human" and "non-human" have become folded together in increasingly complicated ways. Work across a range of disciplines has challenged perceptions of material stasis to propose more nuanced notions of material agency or "vital materialism" (Bennett 2010) with scholars each in their own ways turning their attention to investigations of the hybrid character of ecological, material, and social life, and the entangling of natural and cultural worlds (see also, for example, Descola 2013; Latour 2004).

Dialogical models of heritage push us to consider the relationship between heritage and other social, political, and environmental issues as they do not insist on seeing these various fields as separate, arguing instead that they are interconnected in fundamental and complex ways. In particular, they foreground issues of sustainability and the role of "cultural" heritage conservation as part of a broader environmental agenda (on other relations of natural and cultural heritage, see also Meskell 2012a). Importantly, in the same way that I have argued that "cultural" heritage

issues are connected with "natural" heritage concerns, "the environment" comes to be seen as a "social" issue as much as it does a "natural" one. I want to consider briefly some of the ways in which this opens up debates around the environment, climate change, and "natural" heritage conservation in challenging and potentially important new ways, and also to consider the question of ethics that is invoked by this discussion.

We live in an era in which "environmental concerns" relating to anthropogenic activity dominate the media and contemporary politics. Issues as diverse as climate change, land and soil degradation, species extinction, pollution, overpopulation, and dwindling energy resources influence the lives of every human (and every other-than-human) on the planet. Connectivity ontologies not only imply connections between individual humans and non-humans, but also a level of connection that includes all of them as part of a broader natural-cultural assemblage. A flat notion of the social implies that all "being" is interactive and that all actors are simultaneously produced by other actors. Hence any damage to part of this natural-cultural assemblage also damages other parts of it. Such a notion forces us to broaden the traditional scope of conceptions of the economic and political sphere to develop a more inclusive sense of ethics (on an expanded notion of heritage ethics see also Meskell 2010) that acknowledges not only the rights of humans, but also those of other-than-humans—agentive animals, plants, objects, places, even *practices*—which might also be seen as potentially having rights which we may have obligations to attempt to uphold (see Latour 2004). While it may not yet be clear what those rights precisely are, as we are not always attuned to communicating with these other-than-humans as actors in their own right, this nonetheless forces us to consider how rights and interests in one sphere relate to, and interact with, rights and interests in another.

Connectivity ontologies thus constitute a call for action that empowers parts of the multispecies natural-cultural collective to influence the whole. They also require an acknowledgment of our own implication within and vulnerability to changes that affect other parts of the collective. But this does not mean we are unable to act and that all things must be instinctively conserved "just in case." Instead, connectivity ontologies and their accompanying dialogical models of heritage encourage us to take *action* and to consider the circumstances of each issue or problem on a case-by-case basis. As Rose argues, "connectivity ethics are open, uncertain, attentive, participatory, contingent. One is called upon to act, to engage in the dramas of call-and-response, and to do so on the basis of that which presents itself in the course of life" (2011:143). If certain objects, places, and practices become important at particular times and in particular places for the maintenance of the past in the present, it follows that they may, like humans, come and go, live and die, pass from one state to another (Rose 2011; see also DeSilvey 2006, 2014; Holtorf 2014). This does not mean we should take an indiscriminate view to the conservation of things from the past for the future, but rather that we should develop more discerning and sustainable policies which consider

heritage objects, places, and practices as part of a range of actors in our environment that we nurture and which in turn nurture us, that we recognize change as equally important as stasis (e.g., DeSilvey 2012). The notion of individual humans and other-than-humans as part of a greater collective living system recognizes the need for plural and diverse forms of knowledge and new modes of decision making with which to take account of them.

Sustainability can be defined as the capacity to endure. Connectivity ontologies and dialogical models of heritage help us to characterize sustainability as an issue that is not simply concerned with the maintenance of human quality of life. The concept of sustainability has been important in broadening the "environmental" field to consider a wider range of economic, social, political, ecological and "cultural" issues. Connectivity ontologies encourage us to broaden this field even further to include not only the endurance of our own species, but also the endurance of a range of other non-human actors. In relation to heritage, they force us to question not only the capacities of various material heritages to persist, but also whether the pasts that they actively create in the present could or should endure into the future.

Current discussions focused on thinking through the contemporary implications of the recognition of the Anthropocene epoch frame these points helpfully, but not unambiguously. For, as much as this recognition signals an end to the idea of the separation of humans and other-than-humans, it also embodies nostalgia for this same separation, a longing for a mode of existence that, in the words of my colleague Ben Dibley, "never was" (Dibley 2012:144). Nonetheless, as a concept that represents an increasing public and scientific recognition of connectivity ontologies that simultaneously embodies a warning and recognition of a moment of crisis, the Anthropocene seems an appropriate banner under which to reconsider the prospects for heritage within an expanded natural/cultural field of practice (see also Solli et al. 2011). The deployment of the term within public discourse neatly embodies the sense of responsibility, attachment and working toward common futures (cf. Latour 2011) that I want to emphasize as bound up in a new notion of heritage after nature/culture. Similarly, it also complicates the notion of an "easy fix" to current ecological questions, such as that which is implicit in the idea that climate change is a problem that can be "solved" when the climate itself is enfolded within a complex series of systems—economic, ecological, social. Indeed, to even speak of these systems as if they can somehow be separated off into one domain and do not influence others is itself part of the discursive problem that characterizes the crisis of the present moment into which the notion of the Anthropocene inserts itself.

Heritage as multiple overlapping ontological fields

I have already suggested that one of the aims of exploring the implications of alternative heritage ontologies is to provide new models for reworking and remaking existing heritage practices. However, doing so also suggests the value of developing a broader comparative overview that acknowledges the different future-making

capacities of different heritage ontologies. This might be undertaken with a view not only to enriching our understanding of the range of different ways of caring for and making the future, but also exploring areas where they overlap, which might form the focus for creatively collaborating across these different modes of heritage-making to work toward shared, common heritage futures.

This raises the question of ontological politics and the politics of ontology. I draw here on what Martin Holbraad, Morten Axel Pedersen and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014; discussing Povinelli 2012) refer to as an anthropological sense of ontology as "the multiplicity of forms of existence enacted in concrete practices, where politics becomes the non-skeptical elicitation of this manifold of potential for *how things could be*." They go on to suggest that an ontological politics (in so far as anthropology is concerned) assumes the task of "generat[ing] alternative vantages from which established forms of thinking are put under relentless pressure by alterity itself, and perhaps changed" (Holbraad et al. 2014) in the process.

What has this to do with heritage? I suggest that the dissolution of these old divisions—the folding together of nature and culture, the human and other-than-human—has produced an expanded field for heritage, one in which the open question of *what* and *how heritage could be* has radical and transformative potential if directly addressed. This involves looking not to heritage as we have conventionally understood it but to its alternatives, to creatively and entrepreneurially re-imagine heritage and its practices and to profit from this expanded field by building connections between a range of different domains and fields of practice that we had previously assumed were completely separate from one another.

I use the term "domains" to draw attention to a tendency for these different fields of practice to operate relatively autonomously, with each of these domains specifying particular objects of conservation and accompanying methods of management. Examples of such domains include the fields of biodiversity conservation, built heritage conservation, and endangered language preservation, each of which identifies a specific risk (respectively, loss of biological diversity, loss of cultural patrimony and loss of language and "culture") and an endangered object ("biodiversity," "built heritage," and "language diversity"). Each of these domains applies its own specific techniques for identifying, collecting, conserving, and managing the endangered object and the factors that are perceived to threaten it (see Vidal and Dias 2015). In so far as heritage is generally tasked with preserving its endangered object for the "future," and each of these domains is concerned with establishing its respective conservation targets as both objects of knowledge and fields of intervention, these different heritage domains can be said to be actively engaged in the work of assembling and caring for the future. But this work of assembling and caring for the future does not only take place within heritage domains as conventionally understood. Outside of mainstream definitions of natural and cultural heritage too are domains that are similarly concerned with categorizing, curating, and conserving for the future. We might think here, for example, of nuclear waste disposal. This field, not conventionally conceived as a "heritage" domain,

is nonetheless also concerned with specifying risks (nuclear radiation), identifying endangered objects (biological organisms), and devising methods for their conservation (appropriate methods of nuclear waste disposal), and it does so within a broader framework of working toward sustainable futures.

Heritage as the space in which futures are assembled

Where to begin in this new expanded field of heritage? As a starting point, we must recognize that "heritage" has very little to do with the past but actually involves practices which are fundamentally concerned with assembling and designing the *future*—heritage involves working with the tangible and intangible traces of the past to both materially and discursively remake both ourselves and the world in the present, in anticipation of an outcome that will help constitute a specific (social, economic, or ecological) resource *in* and *for* the future (Harrison 2013; Holtorf 2013; Holtorf and Fairclough 2013; Holtorf and Högberg 2013). This, which my colleague Cornelius Holtorf refers to as the "new heritage" paradigm (Holtorf and Fairclough 2013) has begun to acknowledge that heritage is neither "fixed" nor "inherent," but emerges in dialogue among individuals, communities, practices, places, and things. I would push this blending of categories further to suggest that all domains that are informed by notions of endangerment (cf. Vidal and Dias 2015; see also Rico 2014), care for the future (cf. Holtorf and Högberg 2013), or the presencing of the past (cf. Macdonald 2013) might be considered forms of heritage-making. While heritage is produced as part of a conversation about what is valuable from the past, it can only ever be assembled in the present, in a state of looking toward, and an act of taking responsibility for, the future. We could almost say that the "new heritage" has nothing to do with the past at all, but that it is actually a form of "futurology."

Heritage as regime of care/heritage as act of gathering or assembling

I now turn to the notion of heritage as a *regime of care*. Here we can draw on the Latin roots of the term curate, *curare*, which means to tend and care, to provide for (here implying an obligation or relationship), to heal (here providing a clear link to the well-being strand of the conference), but also to arrange or *assemble* in particular ways. What would it mean for us to consider the futures which are arranged or assembled across a series of different fields of practice—in the decision making processes involved in nuclear waste disposal, in the processes of conserving endangered languages, in global seed banks, in the care and management of local parks, and in household practices of curating heirlooms collectively? How could this new comparative perspective, which considers not only formal heritage practices but also a range of alternative forms of caring for the future, help us remap the field of heritage?

Assembling alternative futures for heritage

One way of beginning to conceptualize such an investigation is to look first to what these different fields of practice hold in common. This is not to say that that they are all able to be reduced to a single set of principles; indeed, it is precisely the heterogeneity across this expanded cultural-natural field that holds so much promise. Nonetheless, I suggest that taking a comparative perspective on a whole range of different natural and cultural heritage practices reveals certain common processes that underlie the practices of heritage-making across a diverse range of contexts. These might be characterized as follows:

- Categorizing (identifying, documenting, nominating, listing, recovering, enumerating);
- Curating (collecting, selecting, attributing value);
- Conserving (caring, preserving, storing, archiving, managing);
- Communicating (using, interpreting, exhibiting).

In thinking of these practices as central to all heritage domains and hence to the spaces in which futures are assembled, we may bring a range of less conventional sites of heritage-making into closer dialogue with "natural and cultural heritage" as they are usually conceived. In so far as they form the basis for developing my current collaborative research program, Assembling Alternative Futures for Heritage, these four key processes provide a common framework within which to compare the mundane and quotidian practices by which heritage (and hence the future) is assembled across a heterogeneous range of locations in the contemporary world and an organizational logic for designing an investigation into modes of heritage-making across a broad range of contexts. We might think of these domains of heritage or modes of heritage-making as particular ontologies of heritage in the sense in which they are concerned with different categories of being and different ways of assembling different futures.

The aim of the collaborative research program Assembling Alternative Futures for Heritage is to understand the practices by which futures are assembled in a range of different domains, and to consider how those practices, and the forms of value that they produce, might be creatively redeployed to produce innovation within new contexts. Accordingly, this research program will explore the processes and material and discursive practices by which heritage is "assembled" within a broad range of domains, which have typically not been considering comparatively, to consider the ways in which the forms of value and alternative practices and processes of future-making involved in each might inform one another. We anticipate particular benefits arising for more conventional aspects of cultural heritage designation, care, and management but expect insights and potential innovation across the broad range of heritage domains in which we will work. The research program aims to introduce not only cross-domain but also cross-cultural and international comparative perspectives to the various fields of practice it will investigate.

The research program is guided by a series of research questions. *Where* and *how* are pasts given a presence in contemporary societies? What are the *networks* that facilitate this process? What *temporalities* are produced by different forms of heritage and how do these articulate with the production of particular *futures*? What are the implications of the different modes of engagement with the *past*, *present*, and *future* that are generated across these various domains? Further, it considers a number of applied research questions. Which models of *assembling*, *valuing*, and *caring* for the future native to one cultural context or domain of practice could be productively applied to others? How might this transportation of new models of heritage-making from one domain to another point toward more *sustainable* practices of managing heritage? Could an emphasis on *process* rather than *permanence* help us to rethink dominant paradigms of conservation and preservation?

We aim to work across a broad range of heritage domains—cultural, natural, biological, geological, even cosmological, including, for example museums, landscape parks, seed banks, "ruins", and archaeological heritage sites in both rural and urban settings, archives, lists of endangered heritage practices and languages relating to ethnic "minority" communities, conservation laboratories, indigenous heritage centers, nuclear waste disposal facilities, and frozen zoo projects in different parts of the world—and consider how the varied practices of value generation and models of caring for the future which are native to one domain might productively be redeployed within other contexts. Activities will take place across four work packages, each of which draws together several heritage domains that share common objectives or common practices, but which have not generally been considered in comparative perspective, to examine the ways in which each domain draws on the past to resource the present in the face of future threat. The collection of domains to be considered by the program are organized under four broad themes:

1. *preparing for uncertain futures*, to investigate the selection of sites for future disposal of nuclear waste, the transmission of messages from earth into outer space, and practices of world heritage designation and management;
2. *managing nature/culture borderlands*, to explore synergies between landscape rewilding initiatives and the management of ruination in built heritage;
3. *curating profusion*, to examine discarding and keeping for posterity in households and small-to-medium-sized museums and the implications of digital data management for both; and
4. *conserving diversity*, to compare ways of valuing and managing biological and cultural diversity in indigenous landscape management, seed banks, herbaria, and frozen zoos.

A first step toward this goal of developing entrepreneurial uses of, and engagements with different forms of heritage involves understanding the varied practices by which heritage futures are actively assembled (cf. Harrison 2013; Macdonald 2009a, 2009b) and the values that are produced in doing so (e.g., Herzfeld 2004; Heinich 2009). Methodologically, this calls for forms of cross-disciplinary

innovation in the investigation of how heritage, its values, and the past and future are actively assembled in the present (see also Meskell 2012b). While our approach is broadly ethnographic, drawing particularly on material, visual, and sensory ethnographies (e.g., Pink and Morgan 2013; see Pink 2009, 2012) and the distribution of agency across material assemblages of persons and things, we also aim to engage more inventive and experimental methods (e.g., Macdonald and Basu 2007) that might better account for emergent practices and the "happening of the social" (Lury and Wakeford 2012). In doing so, we acknowledge the need to draw on experiments in method across the social sciences. Importantly, we aim to move beyond theoretical and conceptual perspectives that have been developed in other contexts to explore the ways in which the various practices of heritage examined *might themselves* be generative of new and distinctive theoretical approaches to understanding the ways in which the future is cared for and curated across varied contexts. In order to facilitate such co-created knowledge (e.g., see Fleming 2013a, 2013b), we will design knowledge exchange events that focus on developing shared solutions to common problems leading where possible to the development of common, sustainable futures for natural and cultural heritage. We hope our research might contribute to a better integration of research, policymaking, practice, and the involvement of better informed publics beyond their treatment simply as audiences.

Conclusions: toward an ontological politics of and for heritage

I would like to conclude with some brief remarks regarding the need to focus on the questions I referred to earlier in my paper regarding an ontological politics *for* heritage (or the politics of heritage ontologies), by which I mean a politics that remains open to the question of what and how heritage *could be*. I suggest that asking ourselves this question is the key to better integrating a range of diverse, apparently eclectic issues of contemporary social, political, economic, and ecological concern and—in so doing—working together to build common futures. When I make reference to common futures in the plural, I do not mean to resurrect a cosmopolitan universalism. As I have tried to point out, as ontologies of heritage, these various different ways of valuing, assembling, and caring for the future also enact distinct realities. But in addition to the different worlds they produce and different futures they assemble, there are also possibilities to build on an understanding of common processes and practices to work across these ontological fields to realize common goals and work toward common futures.

So much for an ontological politics *for* heritage. But what of an ontological politics *of* heritage? Here I make reference to the need to remain vigilant and deeply suspicious of heritage. Heritage is rarely deployed innocently, in the absence of some form of claim toward a self-evident truth that is often divisive or exclusionary, defining the forms of difference it specifies as a function of the past. In doing so, heritage functions to normalize and historicize inequalities of many kinds. I am mindful here of the ways in which heritage, like culture, has come to

function as what Michel Foucault terms a "transactional reality" (see Bennett 2014; Bennett et al. 2014) for the purposes of identifying specific threats, specific endangered objects, specific ways of managing those threats, and specific models of ownership and regimes of expertise that underpin them. Like the culture concept (Bennett 2013), heritage almost always functions toward the differentiation of populations for the purposes of administration and government. Nonetheless, heritage has simultaneously, through its infiltration of almost every part of our lives, become an important language by which people globally attribute value and express a sense of care for special objects, places, and practices. It is in this sense of "heritage" as a series of contingent and emergent modes of caring for, valuing, and assuming an ethical stance toward the future that it remains valuable and in which I am interested in exploring the possibilities inherent in various heritages and their alternatives. But in recognizing the multiplicity of overlapping ontologies inherent in these heritages and their alternatives, we must simultaneously develop an ontological politics *of* heritage that is deeply critical and suspicious of its deployment and its governmental capacities. For this reason I suggest that an "intimate distance" (Bigenho 2012), a simultaneous sense of critical reserve and a creative engagement with the various fields we study, must characterize our approach to a critical heritage studies in (and for) the future.

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