Wherein Lies the Heritage Value? Rethinking the Heritage Value of Cultural Landscapes from an Aboriginal Perspective

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In this paper I consider how a focus on Aboriginal cultural landscapes might inform how heritage value is conceptualized in relation to cultural landscapes as a form of heritage. I begin by describing how the heritage field tends to conceptualize the heritage value of cultural landscapes largely in terms of material or morphological artifacts. This perspective is commensurate with the field's long-standing concern with the conservation of built heritage, but has several potential limitations when applied to cultural landscapes. Having outlined these limitations, I discuss how the study of Aboriginal cultural landscapes can lead to an alternative way of conceptualizing heritage value centred on the close relationship between culture and place and the dynamic spatial practices and performances through which this relationship is constituted and sustained. It is argued that the alternative conceptualization proposed addresses the potential limitations of a materialist framework and results in an approach to value that contributes to ensuring the continued relevance of landscape heritage to cultural identity.

As Head points out, "the cultural heritage sector uses the classical geographical sense of landscapes as modified by human activity, with an emphasis on ancient monuments and historical buildings."[1] In other words, cultural landscape heritage is generally approached in terms of material or morphological artifacts that constitute culturally determined physical, and therefore visible, modifications to the natural landscape. For example, in the UNESCO World Heritage context, the set of cultural landscapes inscribed onto the World Heritage List reflects a clear preference for cultural landscapes characterized primarily by a unique material or morphological cultural imprint on the natural landscape.[2] This observation is congruent with a recent report on World Heritage activities that highlights the current *materialist* approach to cultural landscape heritage as a significant limiting factor when it comes to identifying, assessing, and designating cultural properties that could contribute to redressing existing gaps and imbalances on the World Heritage List.[3]

Horton notes a similar materialist tendency when she highlights the "uneasy fit" between cultural landscapes and the (U.S.) National Register. Horton argues that the National Register's approach to cultural landscapes is dominated by an "artifactual typology," which locates heritage value in discrete physical entities rather than the landscape as a whole. She further argues that this "artifactual typology" has led to a bias against acknowledging cultural land-

scapes in which the visible cultural imprint on the land is minimal, absent, or transient (as in the case of many Aboriginal cultural landscapes).[4]

There are several reasons that can help to explain the cultural sector's emphasis on materiality in its approach to cultural landscapes as a form of heritage:

- First, the field of heritage conservation has traditionally been informed by a European preoccupation with artifacts, architecture, and ruins.[5]
- Second, the problematic wedge often driven between "natural" and "cultural" in heritage conservation supports a conceptual paradigm that equates cultural heritage with tangible cultural artifacts or relics such as buildings and monuments, and equates natural heritage with their absence.
- Third, according to Carl Sauer's original definition of the term, a "cultural landscape" is "the material expression of the (seemingly unified) cultural group who live in [a specific] region."[6] Sauer privileges vision and visible forms as the primary way of identifying and studying cultural landscapes.
- Fourth, according to English and Lee, Western scientific approaches to protected area management are often based on the notion that "if we can understand the physical properties and relationships of natural resources, we can manage them sustainably. The assumption lying behind this approach is that the values of these resources lie purely in their physical nature."[7]

In short, a focus on the materiality of landscape as the basis for heritage designation can be attributed to a Western perspective that permeates the conceptualization of cultural landscapes as a heritage construct. There are at least three potential limitations to approaching cultural landscape heritage in this way. The first is the potential for overlooking the heritage significance of sustained interactions between culture and place in which material or morphological forms are largely absent or do not fulfill criteria for designation. This is particularly problematic when it comes to recognizing the cultural landscape heritage of non-material cultures, a point illustrated by the cases of World Heritage and the National Register described above.

The second potential limitation concerns the inability of a materialist or artifactual framework to adequately accommodate the social heterogeneity and plurality of cultural landscapes. Recent academic scholarship proposes that culture is socially constituted according to networks of power and hegemony that are both reflected and reproduced by material and representational landscapes. Indeed, a number of studies employing social and cultural theory regard landscapes as embodiments of the ideologies espoused by particular social actors who possess the power to reflect their image of the world in material or visual form. However, this is not always readily apparent since landscapes tend to naturalize and render invisible the complex social and cultural processes through which they are constituted such that they appear fixed, reified, and inevitable. They work to efface themselves as complex sites of social interaction. In foregrounding the politics of landscape, these studies alert us to the pitfalls of conceptualizing landscape heritage strictly in terms of material artifacts. To do so would

run the risk of paving over difference by overlooking the experience of those social actors whose relationship to the landscape is not materially evident. [8]

The third limitation stems from the potential to undermine the dynamic temporality of all cultural landscapes. According to McGlade and others, cultural landscapes are never a finished product, but are rather dynamic, fluid, and historically contingent cultural constructs that are always in the process of being shaped and reshaped, both visually and cognitively.[9] The designation of a cultural landscape based largely on the perceived heritage value of material or morphological artifacts has the potential to freeze it in time and space. This is because changes to the elements on which the designation of a heritage property is based—and this is especially true of built or otherwise engineered structures—are naturally discouraged by the act of designation and the management regimes that follow.[10] Indeed, recognizing only those expressions of the relationship between culture and place that are material in form neglects the myriad cultural practices and performances (quotidian and ceremonial) that are integral to the enduring significance and relevance of place to culture.

For the remainder of the paper I consider how the study of North American Aboriginal cultural landscapes can be used as a starting point for the elaboration of an alternative conceptual framework for approaching cultural landscapes, one that is more inclusive of non-material cultures and less prone to undermining the plurality and dynamic temporality inherent to most cultural landscapes. I argue that the study of Aboriginal cultural landscapes can provide a basis for re-evaluating how the heritage value of cultural landscapes—as a category of heritage—is identified. More specifically, it can encourage an approach to cultural landscape heritage that privileges quotidian practice and ritual performance as the means through which a meaningful relationship between culture and place is constituted and sustained over time and space.

Aboriginal cultural landscapes often lack substantial material or morphological cultural artifacts of the kind used as a basis for defining heritage value in most cultural landscapes. In cases where they are present, visible modifications to the natural environment are often indicative of a broader relationship between culture and place rather than the ultimate expression thereof. Consequently, I would argue that Aboriginal cultural landscapes cannot be approached primarily as material heritage, but rather must be approached first and foremost in terms of an enduring relationship between culture and place that is constituted and sustained through a series of spatial practices and performances. These include such things as: the seasonal use of traditional hunting and fishing grounds, the transmission of traditional knowledge, the telling of stories and oral narratives embedded in place, annual gatherings and celebrations, and the daily inhabitation and negotiation of culturally significant spaces. Such spatial practices and performances transform largely unmodified wilderness into meaningful cultural spaces symbolizing a collective consciousness that is inextricably associated with a geographical territory. Aboriginal cultural landscapes remain relevant as long as they are continually reinvested with cultural meaning through practice and inhabitation, but revert back to wilderness, emptied of their cultural significance, if

these cease.[11] They are geographical territories whose cultural significance, and by consequence heritage value, stems from the continuity of a relationship between culture and place that is integral to cultural identity.

Two designated Aboriginal cultural landscapes in Canada offer an opportunity to exemplify the above. Sahoyúé -ˀehdacho National Historic Site[12] commemorates a cultural landscape of the Sahtu Dene and Métis peoples of Canada's Northwest Territories whose oral culture is inextricably linked to the physical environment they inhabit (Figure 1). In this example, "[t]raditional place names serve as memory 'hooks' on which to hang the cultural fabric of a narrative tradition"[13] that relies on the visual, mnemonic role of topographic features (such as mountains and rivers) to assist in the telling and learning of oral history. Through cultural practices which include the use of traditional hunting grounds, story telling and instructional travel, these place names and other traditional knowledge related to the land, are passed on from one generation to the next thereby sustaining the relationship of the people to their land.

Another example can be drawn from Arvia'juaq and Qikiqtaarjuk National Historic Site of Canada which comprises a small island (Arvia'juaq) located near the hamlet of Arviat on Hudson Bay's western shore in Nunavut, and a point of land (Qikiqtaarjuk) immediately opposite (Figure 2). Arvia'juaq is an area rich in marine wildlife and a traditional summer hunting camp of the Paallirmiut Inuit and Qikiqtaarjuk is a sacred site associated with the legend of Kiviuq and contains archaeological evidence of lengthy seasonal occupancy by Paallirmiut hunters. The relationship between culture and place that underpins

Figure 1. Sahoyúé -ˀehdacho National Historic Site, Northwest Territories. Photo courtesy of Stephen Savauge.

Figure 2. Arvia'juaq and Qikiqtaarjuk National Historic Site of Canada, Nunavut. Photo courtesy of Parks Canada.

this cultural landscape is given continuity by the return of the Paallirmiut Inuit to the site year after year and the quotidian and ceremonial practices and performances associated with undertaking this seasonal migration. This continually reinvests the site with meaning as a place where Inuit culture is renewed and reaffirmed.

Ultimately, the study of Aboriginal cultural landscapes in North America can lead to a conceptualization of cultural landscapes (as a form of heritage) that does not rest primarily on an assemblage of material or morphological artifacts. It encourages us to see cultural landscapes first and foremost as a set of cultural relationships to place that are constituted and sustained through spatial practices and performances. These embed meaning in place and give rise to a series of contingent and mutable cultural expressions which can be either material (i.e., built structures) or non-material (i.e., oral histories). However, the locus of heritage value must remain attached to the relationship and the means through which it is sustained rather than the associated cultural expressions, which naturally change over time.

Approaching the heritage value of cultural landscapes in light of the above can help address some of the potential limitations of the materialist approach to cultural landscape heritage discussed above. First, and most obviously, it draws attention to cultural landscapes that are not characterized by substantive visible expressions of the relationship between culture and place. This is important when it comes to acknowledging the cultural landscape heritage of non-material cultures or cultural land-

scapes where the relationship with place does not result in distinct material or morphological imprints on the land.

Second, understanding cultural landscapes as lived, embodied, and practiced has the effect of politicizing and democratizing what might otherwise be a depoliticized valuation of physical and cultural morphologies.[14] Given the social plurality of cultural landscapes, different groups inhabit the landscapes around them in different ways according to their social position. By affording primacy to the practice and inhabitation of place, it is possible to guard against a "one landscape/one message"[15] approach in which social diversity is masked through a focus on the material heritage of those social actors with the power to project their perspective on the world in material form.

Third, conceptualizing cultural landscapes as a relationship to place underpinned by spatial practice implicitly allows for a measure of change in the expressions of this relationship over time. As stated above, cultural landscapes are dynamic entities which can be frozen in time as a result of heritage designation based on historically contingent material formations. An emphasis on practice and performance draws attention to the dynamic nature of cultural landscapes as an unfixed entity.

In conclusion, the study of Aboriginal cultural landscapes can lead to a reconsideration of the way heritage value is attributed to cultural landscapes. The result of such reconsideration is a shift in the locus of heritage value from material and morphological artifacts to the relationship between culture and place and the spatial practices and performances through which this relationship is constituted and sustained over time. Such an approach allows for change in both the material and non-material expressions of the relationship between culture and place without comprising the relevance of the latter as a cornerstone of cultural identity. Indeed, emphasizing spatial practice over material objects allows for an approach that acknowledges the fluidity with which the relationship between culture and place is expressed over time and through space. This shift in thinking about the locus of heritage value in cultural landscapes is congruent with recent landscape theory, which increasingly privileges practice in the study of everyday landscapes. It is also congruent with contemporary thought on other forms of heritage in the domains of museology, anthropology, and archaeology, all of which have had a long-standing concern with material objects and artifacts, but which have begun to emphasize the critical role of practice in the production of cultural meaning and heritage value.[16]

As Raymond Williams notes, "a culture can never be reduced to its artefacts while it is being lived."[17] Indeed, if one sees heritage conservation as synonymous with cultural survival and vitality, it is important to move away from a material and artifactual notion of heritage toward one that privileges the relationships and practices that give rise to artifacts and other cultural expressions. In the case of cultural landscapes, this means focusing on human relationships with the land and the spatial practices through which they are formed. As Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre argue, the practice of heritage conservation risks losing contemporary social relevance if it maintains an emphasis on the physical conservation of artifacts at the expense of considering the mechanisms and processes through which heritage is constituted and articulated. Thus, it is no longer sufficient

to think of heritage "as a static set of objects with fixed meanings," but rather it must be understood as a social and cultural construct "continually created and recreated by social relationships, processes, and negotiations."[18]

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Endnotes

1. Lesley Head, *Cultural Landscapes and Environmental Change* (London: Arnold, 2000), 77.
2. See Henry Cleere, "The Uneasy Bedfellows: Universality and Cultural Heritage," in *The Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Property*, Robert Layton, Peter G. Stone, and Julian Thomas, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 22–29; Peter J. Fowler, *World Heritage Cultural Landscapes 1992–2002, World Heritage Paper no. 6* (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2003); Lisa Prosper, "Cultural Landscapes and World Heritage: An Uneasy Relationship?" (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ont., 2004).
3. ICOMOS, *The World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps—An Action Plan for the Future* (Paris: ICOMOS, 2004), 44 (emphasis added).
4. Tonia W. Horton, "Writing Ethnographic History: Historic Preservation, Cultural Landscapes, and Traditional Cultural Properties," in *Northern Ethnographic Landscapes: Perspectives from Circumpolar Nations*, Igor Krupnik, Rachel Mason, and Tonia Horton, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 71.
5. See Cleere (2001); David C. Harvey, "Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7:4 (2001), 319–338; Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
6. Timothy Cresswell, "Landscape and the Obliteration of Practice," in *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift, eds. (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 270.
7. Anthony J. English and Ellen Lee, "Managing the Intangible," in *The Full Value of Parks: From Economics to the Intangible*, David Harmon and Allen D. Putney, eds. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 46.
8. See James S. Duncan, *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Barbara Bender and Margot Winer, eds. *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Cresswell (2003); Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's*

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9. James McGlade, "Archaeology and the Evolution of Cultural Landscapes: Towards an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda," in *The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape: Shaping Your Landscape*, Peter J. Ucko and Robert Layton, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 458–482.
10. Keith Emerick, "Use, Value and Significance in Heritage Management," in *The Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Property*, Robert Layton, Peter G. Stone, and Julian Thomas, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 276–285.
11. See Igor Krupnik, Rachel Mason, and Susan Buggey, "Introduction: Landscapes, Perspectives, and Nations," in *Northern Ethnographic Landscapes: Perspectives from Circumpolar Nations*, Igor Krupnik, Rachel Mason, and Tonia Horton, eds. (Washington D.C.: Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 1–13; Thomas D. Andrews, "'The Land is Like a Book': Cultural Landscape Management in the Northwest Territories, Canada," in *Northern Ethnographic Landscapes: Perspectives from Circumpolar Nations*, Igor Krupnik, Rachel Mason, and Tonia Horton, eds. (Washington D.C.: Arctic Studies Center, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 301–322.
12. [Editor's note: The superscripted question mark is meant as a representation of the Dene-language diacritic for a full glottal stop at the beginning of a word. The real diacritic looks like a regular-sized question mark, but without the dot. There is no acceptable typographic equivalent short of implementing a special Dene-language typeface. Since that was not practical in this instance, we opted for this representation.]
13. The Sahtu Heritage Places and Sites Joint Working Group, *Rakekée Gok'é Godi: Places We Take Care Of* (Northwest Territories, 2000).
14. Denis Cosgrove, "Landscape and the European Sense of Sight—Eyeing Landscape," in *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift, eds. (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 249–268.
15. Alan R.H. Baker, "Introduction," in *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective*, Alan R.H. Baker and Gideon Biger, eds. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.
16. See Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Chris Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Michael Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer, eds., *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006).
17. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 343.
18. Erica Avrami, Randall Mason, and Marta de la Torre, "Report on Research," and "Overview," in *Values and Heritage Conservation: Research Report* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2000), 6 and 14, respectively.

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