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Conservation Values, the Authorised Heritage Discourse and the Conservation-Planning Assemblage

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The focus of this paper is the practice of conservation applied through the English planning system, termed conservation-planning. It argues that a distinct conservation-planning social entity has developed that may be described as an 'assemblage' and that the values and validated practice of conservation planning are constructed as an Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD). Emphasis is placed upon the way that the AHD maybe mobilised by the conservation-planning assemblage in relation to other elite discourses, explored through the way that relationships have developed between the policy spheres of conservation-planning, regeneration and economic development. In doing so, it is argued conservation has successfully repositioned itself from being regarded as a barrier to development to being regarded as an active agent of change.

Furthermore, the paper proposes that within the conservation-planning AHD we might detect sub-AHDs, organised around the short-hand labels of *Conservation Principles*, *The Heritage Dividend* and *Constructive Conservation*, each with a somewhat different rhetorical purpose. Through this analysis, we can better understand conservation-planning as a distinct heritage social entity and process. It shares values with other heritage activities but also has distinct differences, intimately related to its political relationship with other domains of urban management.

Keywords: Values; AHD; assemblage; conservation-planning; regeneration; English Heritage

Introduction

Conservation as a verb is an activity that can be applied in many different contexts and the term is applied in many different fields of human action. The focus in this paper is the practice of conservation applied through the English town planning system to a particular form of material cultural heritage, encompassed by terms such as 'historic environment' and 'cultural built heritage', or what is termed in this paper conservation-planning. It is argued that the practice of conservation-planning, and what is received as constituting validated principles or 'good practice', both shares unifying features and divisions with other domains of conservation activity. Whilst the focus is upon a specific dimension of English conservation practice, the paper aims to contribute to theoretical debates in the study of heritage, in particular in the context of heritage situations where conservation objectives exist in competition with other elite interests in the management of urban space.

The paper argues that there has developed a distinct conservation-planning social entity, described as an assemblage; a concept discussed below. This social entity has its own distinct history, stories, institutions and institutional context and relationship with actors and interests outside the heritage sphere. Following a discussion of the conservation-planning assemblage, the paper charts the development of conservation-planning from nineteenth century architectural conservation origins, before focusing on two key contemporary conceptual underpinnings for the analysis of conservation practice; first understanding conservation as a values-based activity and, second, the importance of discourse. Following Laurajane Smith (2006), the paper considers this second element in the terms of an Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD), in understanding how particular values are sustained and privileged.

These ideas are then used to explore the way that, in England, relationships have developed between the policy spheres of conservation-planning, regeneration and economic development. In doing so, it is argued that conservation has largely successfully repositioned itself from being regarded as a barrier to development to being regarded as an active agent of change. In the process conservation-planning, whilst sharing ancestry and values with other spheres of conservation activity, has become something distinct and different. In addition, whilst the conservation-planning assemblage has demonstrated a recognisable AHD, it is not entirely self-referential, but is affected and changed because of wider social forces and tactical positioning within the political and economic frames within which it works. Furthermore, the paper proposes that within the conservation-planning AHD we might detect sub-AHDs, organised in the paper around the short-hand labels of *Conservation Principles*, *The Heritage Dividend* and *Constructive Conservation*. These share some over-arching constituent characteristics, such as control over the definition of heritage. However, it is argued that each has a somewhat different rhetorical purpose and highlights different dimensions of conservation-planning practices and processes. Through this analysis, we can better understand conservation-planning as a distinct heritage social entity and process. It shares values with other heritage activities but also has distinct differences, intimately related to its political relationship with other domains of urban management.

Conservation-Planning as an Assemblage

The term assemblage is used in this paper as elaborated by Manuel DeLanda in *A New Philosophy of Society* (2006), who in turn was drawing on Gilles Deleuze¹. In brief, we can define an assemblage as a non-essentialist, non-totalizing social entity, constructed through specific historical processes and from heterogeneous parts. An assemblage embraces institutional organisations, norms and objects (for example, laws and regulations) and normalised practices. Assemblages constantly undergo iterative change and evolution. Conflict with other social systems can be important in sharpening the identity of the assemblage community; for example, by exaggerating distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Linguistic components are important (but not, according to DeLanda, constitutive); for example, by the use of shared stories and categories as part of group boundary construction. This institutional context and its various adjuncts – for example, the legal regime of consultation rights that accompanies conservation-planning legislation – forms an important part of the assemblage, as does the character of normalised practices and values². One of the great utilities of assemblage as a concept is its ability to co-join different actors

(individuals or organisations) and their narratives and stories with other dimensions – for example legal and policy frameworks – and conceive these together as a definable and extremely complex and non-static social entity. Indeed, the buildings and environments involved in conservation practice form part of the assemblage and can acquire agency; the importance of seeing agency as extending beyond people has been emphasised by Jane Bennett (2005), amongst others.

In this paper, I am mostly using the idea of assemblage as a descriptor of a provisional unity (Anderson and Macfarlane 2011) across the field of English conservation-planning. If we translate DeLanda's ideas to English conservation-planning we can conceive a social entity consisting of a series of organisations and individuals. This includes a well articulated voluntary sector of both national amenity bodies, some with statutory status in the planning system (for example, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) and some without (for example, SAVE Britain's Heritage) together with an extensive local amenity sector; a central function, in England represented in particular by English Heritage, importantly with some independence from government; and, a series of conservation officers and teams in local planning authorities. Around this has developed a professional infrastructure with representative professional bodies, in particular the Institute of Historic Building Conservation with a core membership of local authority conservation officers; key actants in conservation-planning decision-making. In many respects the assemblage can be characterised as having been extremely successful, for example, in terms of developing its material content through the sheer quantum of the environment incorporated as legally-defined (or authorised) heritage (Pendlebury 2000).

This assemblage is not a seamless totality, however. It developed through the course of the twentieth century both in terms of the groups and individuals who form the assemblage and also in terms of its wider composition; for example, the legal framework for conservation-planning. Open conflict with other social interests has been of critical importance in defining the conservation-planning assemblage at various points and external threat continues as an important narrative. This institutional context and its various adjuncts – for example the legal regime of consultation rights that accompanies the legislation – forms an important part of the assemblage, as does the character of normalised practices and values. Importantly, these practices and values have focused upon creating a moralistic framework, articulated through an AHD, for the 'correct' actions to undertake in encountering the non-human actants of buildings and places. Also importantly, it is not purely a heritage assemblage; its material content is in part comprised of institutions, norms and objects from town planning.

A distinguishing dimension of assemblage theory, along with related approaches such as the Actor Network Theory, is the attention they give to non-human dimensions. This is helpful as it is the coming together of the various other dimensions of the assemblage with the materiality of buildings and places that constitute the practice of conservation-planning. Further, the physical world reinforces the power and authority of the assemblage and the outcomes of conservation-planning practices are influenced by, and in turn influence, the evolution of conservation-planning values and the conservation-planning AHD. Conceiving of conservation-planning as an assemblage also helps to highlight the heterogeneity of conservation-planning and heritage management more broadly. It helps draw out the complexity of conservation-

planning, its non-static nature and the way that power relations are both horizontal as well as vertical and are being constantly renegotiated; 'power as plurality in transformation' (Anderson and McFarlane 2011, p. 125). It also emphasises the particularity of the conservation-planning assemblage; a key facet of assemblages is their singularity (Bennett, 2009).

The use of assemblage theory has gradually been developing momentum in heritage studies. For example, Mikkel Bille (2012) has used it to understand the process of heritage definition – the international valorisation of Bedouin heritage in Jordan on UNESCO's list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Often there has been a focus on particular cases. For example, work by Jean Hillier has analysed the regeneration of the historic former Newmarket saleyards and abattoirs site in Melbourne, Australia in these terms (Hillier 2012a, 2012b). Sharon Macdonald's (2009) discussion of Nazi landscapes in Nuremburg highlights how, in contrast to heritage writing that has talked in terms of finished heritage products as an outcome of particular political or policy processes, an assemblage approach demands greater attention to 'the multiple, heterogeneous and often highly specific actions and techniques that are involved in achieving and maintaining heritage' (p. 118). From this perspective, politics and policy remain relevant but are not necessarily explanatory in themselves; outcomes become less inevitable. However, Macdonald whilst accepting the importance of the material or technical, argues for the importance of human agency and, drawing on her case study, the importance of language. These are important points I return to later.

Distinguishing Conservation-Planning

Conservation-planning sits within a broader family of conservation activity, with some important shared values. However, conservation-planning also encompasses values and validated practices that distinguish it from other conservation activities. Laurajane Smith has argued convincingly that we should think of heritage as a cultural practice, rather than a 'thing' (Smith 2006, p. 44). To define the subject of this paper, however, we need to use the commonly used definitions and demarcations of heritage used in professional arenas and the way different sorts of heritage and their management are distinguished.

Thus, in terms of the particular history of conservation in England, we can regard conservation-planning as part of a family of practice concerned with cultural, material heritage. Material heritage conservation encompasses a diversity of activities, including, for example, seeking to sustain in some way a historic building or place (the theme of this paper) or a painting or museum object. Many shared values, philosophies and principles can be traced across a broad spectrum of such activities. Salvador Munoz-Vinas (2005) sets out a theory of contemporary conservation encompassing a diverse body of conservation practice, including architectural conservation but also, for example, painting conservation. He traces a lineage of conservation that emphasises its unity of practice. Further, he examines powerful underlying precepts such as notions of authenticity, as well as the terminological and conceptual significance of such words as preservation, conservation and restoration that are important in coding conservation processes. Conservation-planning sits particularly close to other conservation activities concerned with the wider material heritage of buildings and landscapes, especially archaeology, which has some shared

underpinnings and a partly shared governance context. However, conservation-planning and archaeology have different material networks, such as educational and professional bases with attendant professions and professional cultures, different literatures and therefore effectively different epistemologies and different canonical texts coding their spheres of activity – their values and practices. The relationship between architectural conservation and conservation-planning is particularly nuanced and for the purpose of this paper I will not seek to make a sharp distinction between the two. Indeed, the modern practice of conservation-planning largely (although not exclusively) stems from the older field of architectural conservation.

Since the development of ‘modern architectural conservation’ in the second half of the nineteenth century it has, as an activity, been powerfully coded by a series of key individuals and canonical documents, sharing much of the intellectual territory defined by Munoz-Vinas. The origins of modern architectural conservation in Britain rest with claims on two nineteenth century polymaths, famous across a range of artistic and social domains, John Ruskin and William Morris. These figures represent an idea of conservation as critical opposition to practices of transformation and change. In particular, they were famous for opposing the restoration of ecclesiastical buildings through radical interventions in building fabric that also claimed to be conservation. Rather simplistically, this came to be represented as ‘conservative repair’, as advocated by Ruskin and Morris, versus ‘stylistic restoration’, which has become particularly associated with the French architect Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (Jokilehto 1999). Their views about how buildings should be treated were underpinned by a view of why such buildings should be valued, particularly centred on ideas of inter-generational stewardship.

A critical precept for Ruskin and Morris was that the value of the building, its authenticity, is closely associated with its material fabric. The goal of the architect or conservator should be to make as little physical alteration to the historic building as possible. Ruskin’s ideas and protests were mobilised and codified by the *Manifesto* drafted by Morris in 1877 at the formation of the Society of the Protection of Ancient Buildings (Morris 1877). This remains a touchstone document within the field of architectural conservation and SPAB remain a significant amenity body. Thus Ruskin and Morris articulated principles of conservation action – created a discourse – to influence material practice, about *how* buildings should be treated, such as the idea of minimum intervention, that are still current.

Though neither Ruskin nor Morris were solely concerned with churches – it might be more accurate to say they were concerned with architecture they saw as defining Englishness – it is for their battles over the ecclesiastical heritage that they are particularly recalled. The material content, or *what*, of architectural conservation has undergone a subsequent extraordinary transformation. Definitions of buildings, places, and environments that are ascribed with heritage value have extended in ways one imagines they would have found difficult to contemplate, including some of the constructions of their fury. Thus, we have seen protection extended to a huge diversity of buildings and objects in terms of architectural style and temporal period. In addition, we have also seen conservation protection extend beyond architectural conservation into place-management, into a new field of conservation-planning.

This broadening has often come about through a continuation of the tactics of Ruskin, Morris and SPAB of critical opposition, often represented, and proselytised for, by temporal period. Thus we have the formation in chronological succession of the Georgian Group (as a breakaway from SPAB), the Victorian Society, the Thirties Society with the latter in turn reconstituting itself as the Twentieth Century Society; each campaigning for the value of a particular historical period. Campaigns, over the course of the twentieth century became increasingly focused on influencing the planning system through, for example, lobbying for buildings to be listed and against any subsequent moves to gain listed building consent for demolition or unsympathetic alteration. Throughout the period that conservation-planning has developed its advocates have been involved in development struggles and in open conflict with other social interests (from, for example, ‘philistine developers’), something that has in turn been important in defining and territorialising those involved in the activity. Moreover, the mission developed in other ways – most notably the increasing focus from the mid-twentieth century to look beyond the monumental to historic *places*. This was perhaps best represented by the formation of the now defunct Civic Trust, alongside a myriad of local place-based groups, and the subsequent creation of the conservation area system. In recent decades, we can see the development of a professional infrastructure with representative professional bodies, such as the Institute of Historic Building Conservation.

In the process, key principles of intervention have endured albeit within an evolving framework. Therefore, for example, this has included new concepts of approach to traditional architectural conservation problems. There is now greater tolerance towards interventions if these can be considered reversible (British Standards Institution 1998). There has also developed a greater emphasis on aesthetic considerations. The extension of the mission of conservation from object to place, and the management of place, reinforced this compositional element, for example, through the influence of the townscape movement (Worskett 1969, Larkham 2003; Pendlebury 2009). Thus, as architectural conservation as an activity has been extended over a much more significant quantity of buildings and places over time, part of the domain of architectural conservation has been increasingly linked into systems and processes of town planning and has acquired values and tropes from planning, becoming the conservation-planning assemblage.

Constructing Values

An increasingly common framework spanning academe and practice has been to conceive of conservation as a values-based activity. This is often mobilised around ‘why’ questions – what is significant about a building or place that makes it something we should seek to protect? A standard academic premise has become that concepts of cultural, historical, or social value are culturally and historically constructed; ‘value is not an *intrinsic* quality but rather the fabric, object or environment is the bearer of an externally imposed culturally and historically specific meaning, that attracts a value status depending on the dominant frameworks of value of the time and place’ (Gibson & Pendlebury 2009, p. 1). Randall Mason (2008) talks in terms of ‘values-centred theory’, arguing that the key points this establishes is that buildings and places have different kinds of value to different stakeholders and that understanding values in this way helps good decision-making.

The history of conservationists describing and ascribing values to buildings and places using typologies of value starts with Alois Riegl who produced an influential early typology of heritage values in 1903 (Jokilehto 1999). Many subsequent typologies have been produced, including the influential Australian *Burra Charter*, originally adopted in 1979 and subsequently revised (Australia ICOMOS, 1999). A significant, specifically English ‘official’ statement on values, appeared under the *imprateur* of English Heritage in 2008, *Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance For the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (English Heritage 2008a). It is intended first and foremost as an English Heritage document – to ensure a consistent and reasoned approach from English Heritage – but is also intended to have a wider influence. In other words, it is intended to code the value system of the conservation planning assemblage, ‘establishing the sacred origins of authority’ (Delanda 2006, p. 15). *Conservation Principles* sets out four key sets of heritage value: evidential value; historical value; aesthetic value; and communal value. Evidential value and aesthetic value represent a historical continuity of focus on fabric and aesthetics and historical value picks up the historically subordinate area of historical association, although this is also linked back to material evidence. More novel is the inclusion of communal values, although as Emma Waterton (2010) has shown, this is subsidiary and generally assumed to be dependant on the other, primary, values. What the *Conservation Principles* document only fleetingly touches upon is what are termed wider social and economic instrumental benefits that may flow from heritage protection; ‘Utility and market values, and instrumental benefits, are different from heritage values in nature and effect’ (English Heritage 2008a, p. 27). However, as this paper discusses below, arguments about these benefits are central to much contemporary conservation-planning positioning and practice.

Thus, the conservation-planning assemblage is partly defined by a history in architectural conservation, its mythology and organising ideas, that whilst not immutable, can be extremely stable and reinforced by canonical texts that code and solidify the identity of the practice and its norms. Change that does occur in terms of how, why and what buildings should be conserved occurs at differential speeds, with each dimension having a different pace of change and ability to be normalised within the assemblage. Therefore, whilst an emphasis on the authenticity of fabric is an extremely stable value, other values can shift relatively rapidly. For example, the first English post-war listings of modernist constructions were seen at the time, in the late 1980s, as very controversial, including within the conservation world (While 2007). One strand of the conservation movement still alive and active at the time had campaigned against the construction of some of these buildings, for their impact during the previous cycle of demolition and building, and the promotion of modernist heritage was initially something of a subaltern movement. However, within a decade the broad principle of selective post-war listing no longer seemed particularly remarkable (albeit with on-going controversies about particular cases) and a sub-conservation sector with a focus on these buildings and places had developed – the Twentieth Century Society shifted from being the Thirties Society in 1992 and, internationally, DOCOMOMO (the International Committee for the Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement) was formed in 1988. Within English Heritage mechanisms were developed to support the promotion of the idea of a post-war heritage (While 2007, Harwood 2010) and an academic literature arose (see for example, McDonald 1996, Cunningham 1998).

Controlling and Changing Values: the Authorised Heritage Discourse

Alongside their call to action, Ruskin and Morris were effectively theorising the practice of conservation. Foremost were questions of *how* conservation practices should be undertaken, setting principles that still endure. Conversely, the ‘content’ of *what* should be conserved has grown exponentially. Discussions of *who*, or ‘whose heritage’, have often, until relatively recently, been restricted to bland abstractions about society. Of course, questions of ‘who’; who defines, who controls, who has power, who benefits, are central to much contemporary academic discourse across many disciplines. This has had dramatic impact on the study of heritage and conservation (and planning) and a lesser but noticeable impact on practice.

The question of who defines and controls heritage has been at the heart of the work of Laurajane Smith. Smith (2006) has considered how particular values are sustained and privileged and used to regulate heritage practice and norms in terms of discourse. Using Critical Discourse Analysis she posits an Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) that she applies to multiple forms of material cultural heritage protection and management, including archaeology and architectural conservation. The AHD is considered a self-referential discourse that ‘privileges monumentality and grand scale, innate artefact/ site significance tied to time depth, scientific/aesthetic expert judgement, social consensus and nation building’ (p. 11). The AHD can seek to control fundamental questions about why material objects from the past should be considered valuable and extend this to what should be protected and to how that protection should take place; that is, what constitutes acceptable conservation practice.

The AHD is a useful concept. It emphasises the significance of discourse in territorialising the conservation assemblage. Indeed, part of Smith’s AHD is the norms and objects that help define and control the discourse and that are also an important part of the assemblage – she discusses charters produced by the international conservation body, ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and Emma Waterton (2010) has subsequently applied a similar analysis to English Heritage’s *Conservation Principles* discussed above. Furthermore, critical to Smith’s concept, are the power relations it embodies, and the way that the AHD is used to close-down other possible heritages, or subaltern heritages, and as such is seen as a regressive process, a point that subsequent writings by Smith (for example, 2010) and others (for example, Waterton 2010, 2011) reinforce.

Smith is correct to distinguish between the AHD and other heritage possibilities, and to highlight the AHD as a way of controlling the definition of heritage that receives official sanction and its management. However, a focus on conceptions of value internally generated amongst the heritage elite potentially underplays other forces within the conservation-planning assemblage. It allows little recognition of external forces that might shape conservation values or the AHD, whether they be broader social movements or explicit tactical responses of the AHD-formers to external pressures. Thus, for example, an important discourse in conservation-planning has often been between heritage and ‘non-heritage’, or heritage traduced. A powerful territorialising force in the formation of the conservation-planning assemblage was resistance to the erasure of heritage, particularly evident in the volatile period of the

1960s and 1970s, as wholesale urban clearances were challenged by both conservationists and broader social movements (see for example, Castells 2004 for discussion of broader social movements). Whilst such rapid destructive change to urban environments in the UK may no longer be present, external threat remains a powerful binding discourse. The importance of the AHD in this context is not only to press the claim of an elite, monumental heritage over other heritage possibilities, but to claim superior cultural capital and value, 'civilised values', as a strategy of resistance to established modes of capital accumulation through land and property development. Seen in this way, the AHD is thus not an exclusively self-referential discourse. Nor, perhaps, is it always regressive. Whilst it might serve the purposes of a particular elite, this maybe less at the expense of suppressing subaltern heritage as in competition for control over the built environment with other elite interests. The competing pressures on the management of heritage, between cultural actors intent on sustaining cultural value and other actors focused on realising economic value from place is perhaps one of the key tensions that distinguishes conservation-planning from other heritage practices.

Thus, whilst it is certainly true that the conservation-planning assemblage seeks to establish value-based norms, these are by no means static and exist in a complex and shifting relationship that heritage conservation has with other place-management value systems (see for example, Ashworth 1997, Pendlebury 2009). Indeed, the ability to absorb and adopt change, sometimes generated through tactical positioning, without apparently causing crisis is an important characteristic of the conservation-planning assemblage. It is what Edward Hobson (2004) has termed a 'rolling consensus'. Therefore, whilst we find powerful coding processes to consolidate identity, we also find decoding processes that allow flexibility and allow conservation-planning to develop and change, in part due to external circumstance and pressure. A significant influence in this process, in recent decades, has been the influence of broader policy imperatives upon the heritage sector. For example, in the UK, and particularly England, there was a strong social policy influence on the instrumental roles heritage should perform under recent Labour administrations that permeated much of the sector (see Gray 2002, 2008 for discussions of the arts and museums). Social inclusion was a powerful rhetoric in this period adopted in the heritage sector as a matter of necessity and expediency (Pendlebury et. al. 2004, Waterton 2010). I will argue that these external forces can lead to tactical presentations by the conservation movement that may become stabilised and institutionalised as value in turn.

The economic challenge and the Heritage Dividend

This section focuses upon the positioning of conservation as complementary to physical regeneration and economic development and how this has been a critical feature in the success of the assemblage sustaining itself under different political administrations and very different economic conditions. Whilst other external agendas have been significant at particular times, such as social inclusion under the Labour government after 1997, how the presence of heritage might aid or inhibit the economic success of places has been a key issue since the 1970s.

Jane Jacobs (1961) famously argued for the utility of old buildings in the urban economy. Yet in Britain until the 1970s, most state efforts at improving urban

economic conditions were based around renewal and physical redevelopment. This decade saw a significant shift in direction as the developing field of urban policy saw a growing emphasis on the recycling and rehabilitation of existing building stock, initially in housing areas but gradually extending to other contexts (Roberts 2000). This shift was parallel to, and intertwined with, but distinct from the development of conservation-planning. Towards the end of the 1970s we can trace the development of conservation organisations directly linking to this emergent urban policy of regeneration and seeking to demonstrate the economic sense of a conservation approach (for example, SAVE Britain's Heritage 1978). Examples of this process were becoming evident. The Covent Garden area, slated for demolition by the Greater London Council a few years before, became a festival market place-type shopping arena. Saved from wholesale clearance by community activism, the area was steadily gentrified, as investors realised its potential. Perhaps the exemplar of heritage being positioned at the front of regeneration programmes in the 1980s was the way in which the restoration and reuse of Albert Dock, a large complex of Grade 1 listed warehouses in Liverpool, became the regeneration flagship of the Merseyside Development Corporation. This combined the physical regeneration of superb quality industrial buildings with a focus on culture; Albert Dock hosts both a maritime museum and an outpost of the Tate gallery (Pendlebury 2009). More recently, an International Slavery Museum has been opened, giving some recognition to the commercial processes that generated huge wealth in Liverpool to construct industrial buildings such as Albert Dock.

By the early 1990s, significant parts of the conservation sector in the UK had fully embraced these more economically instrumental relationships. In part this had been driven by central-government policy. For example, the economic role of conservation emerged in planning guidance in DoE Circular 8/87, which argued that conservation is an economically beneficial activity (Department of the Environment 1987); a message subsequently reinforced in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (Department of the Environment and Department of National Heritage 1994). A key body in mediating and promoting this agenda has been English Heritage. Throughout the course of the 1990s, English Heritage became steadily more engaged with urban regeneration. For example, the English Heritage area funding scheme, Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes (HERS), launched in 1999, was explicitly targeted at the most deprived areas as defined by government indices.

Challenges to the complementarity of regeneration and heritage have been met with well-organised responses from English Heritage and other heritage-sector organisations. For example, reference to historic buildings being a restraint on regeneration in the *Prospectus* of the government-commissioned Urban Task Force (UTF) (Urban Task Force 1998) generated a series of responses arguing the conservation case (for example, English Heritage 1998; SAVE Britain's Heritage 1998) and the final report of the UTF was noticeably more positive about the historic environment (Urban Task Force 1999) with the subsequent Urban White Paper more so again (Pendlebury and Strange 2011). A subsequent English Heritage publication, entitled *The Heritage Dividend* (English Heritage 1999), was the start of a continuing process of more thorough documentation of the economic impact of heritage-spending and the ability to present this in terms of the performance measures and indicators that might be recognised by evaluators of mainstream regeneration funding schemes. It was followed up with a second *Heritage Dividend Report* (English Heritage 2002),

and there subsequently have been a number of other reports seeking to demonstrate the economic impact of heritage spending, for instance on waterways (ECOTEC 2003), traditional farm buildings (English Heritage and DEFRA 2005), seaside towns (English Heritage 2007) as well as on the economic contribution of cathedrals (ECOTEC 2004). In reflecting on the history of the Heritage Dividend initiative a 2005 report noted that:

The brand has played a key role in the promotion and repositioning of English Heritage as a pro-active, enabling organisation, fully engaged in regenerating some of the UK's most economically deprived and physically run-down communities. (English Heritage 2005, p. 3)

It also pointed out that the measures adopted have focused on positive by-products rather than the core purpose of the schemes. That is to say, what has been measured has been related to mainstream regeneration indices rather than to the success of schemes in terms of conservation measures and values. Support for this interrelationship between conservation and regeneration came from, for example, a Parliamentary Select Committee (House of Commons ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee 2004) and this discourse continued throughout the period of Labour government from the amenity sector (see for example, Agencies Co-ordinating Group 2008) and the government itself in its swansong statement on heritage issues (HM Government 2010).

Thus in the UK, as well as conservation being seen as a force for continuity – balanced against forces for change – it has been presented as an *active agent* of change in itself. The concept of change has been decoupled from physical change, or at least it no longer tends to be associated with the erasure of existing physical environments and their replacement with new. Increasingly the discourse has become that necessary change can be achieved, and indeed enhanced, by conserving and recycling historic buildings in ways compatible with conservation objectives. This became particularly strongly articulated in the relationship between conservation and regeneration initiatives that focused on the physical environment (Pendlebury 2002). This is something that came about through an active, recurrent positioning of conservation-planning within the wider planning and regeneration system and can be seen as part of the Authorised Heritage Discourse. Although here the AHD seems to be of a rather different nature to the AHD embodied in the *Conservation Principles* document referred to above. The AHD in this instance does not have the principal purpose of regulating and controlling conservation practice. Rather the assemblage has responded to wider and policy and economic imperatives. It has sought to influence these, for example on shifting the narrative content in the Urban Renaissance. Equally, these external forces have had direct impacts on the assemblage composition, for example, through government policy presenting conservation and regeneration as complementary activities.

The adaption of conservation values for such instrumental purposes, however, can be internally contentious within the assemblage. For example, Hobson (2004) found that, whilst his interviewees in the conservation sector understood the political importance of the regeneration agenda some interviewees argued that this imperative was being used to legitimate inappropriate development; the pragmatics of economic possibility was, in their view, being used to override conservation concerns (although it is

noticeable these tensions were revealed by research rather than the public statements of the bodies Hobson's interviewees worked for). Thus, the very success of the repositioning of the value of historic buildings and places opened a new series of problems. As the market discovered the economic potential latent in recycling historic buildings, it sought to do so on its own terms. As Gregory Ashworth has described, conservation developed two paradigms; one based around the traditional conservation-value set discussed above and the other an explicit commodification – the use of the past as a saleable product (Ashworth 1997). For example, a practice such as facadism, which gives the veneer of a historic building to new construction, challenges fundamental precepts such as authenticity deriving from historic fabric (Pendlebury 2009). We should also note this is a specifically British (and, because of the significant role of English Heritage, in part specifically English) construction of conservation-planning that is not necessarily found in other countries. For example, Dennis Rodwell (2010, p. 124) has written about the slowness of ICOMOS to accept what has long been a truism in British practice, that conservation is the management of change, citing a recent document that states: 'conservation does not mean 'managing change', but preserving'.

However, overall the English conservation-planning assemblage has enthusiastically repositioned the idea of conservation from being understood as a barrier to change, to being seen as an active and complementary agent in the process. English Heritage and others have created an AHD around such concepts as *The Heritage Dividend*, rather different in nature than that represented by *Conservation Principles*. This is focused on regeneration, a process of physical and economic revitalisation to particular places felt to need such intervention. However, the discourse of complementarity to economic development has extended further. The next section looks at how English Heritage has sought to do this through a series of documents over the last decade or so.

Constructive Conservation?

English Heritage frequently produces glossy, image-laden case study-based documents generally with purpose of illustrating good practice around an overall theme. Three of the documents that appeared in the 2000s had the titles *Capital Solutions* (2004), *Shared Interest: Celebrating Investment in the Historic Environment* (2006) and *Constructive Conservation in Practice* (2008b). These are significant documents not only in terms of describing practice, but also in terms of seeking to benchmark what can be considered *good* practice.

Capital Solutions is a series of case studies seen to represent good practice in London. The case studies show-cased mostly show fairly substantive alterations to historic buildings, often through dramatic contemporary design. As the English Heritage Chief Executive states in the introduction, 'English Heritage believes that conservation is about managing not preventing change. No one has to choose between conservation and modernity' (p. 1). The most extraordinary case study is the first, Sadlers Wells Theatre. The first line in this first case study is 'Sometimes demolition is the best solution', a strange jumping off point in a document prepared by the national conservation agency. The old listed building 'simply failed to meet modern standards and no amount of adaption could change that.' English Heritage's role was, apparently, 'to facilitate the redevelopment' (p. 3).

Shared Interest's purpose was to take the messages from *Capital Solutions* and illustrate them across the country. Four key messages were set out: historic places are generally capable of adaption and reuse; historic places help create successful schemes; investment is good for the historic environment, and; English Heritage understands the development industry. Perhaps the most extreme highlighted case in this document was the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Here English Heritage supported the removal of the major part of the concert hall and its replacement with a fifteen storey hotel – all that was retained of the historic building was the Italian palazzo façade. As the document notes 'our public support for the proposal was, initially, also controversial' (p. 43).

The follow-up publication from 2008, *Constructive Conservation in Practice*, features Park Hill, Sheffield on the cover; the illustration is titled 'Park Hill, a conservation-led project'. This substantial, pioneering 1950s deck-access council housing scheme sits in a prominent location overlooking Sheffield city centre. Listed in 1998, this was always a controversial and problematic listing, given the general unpopularity of much post-war modernist council housing and the poor physical condition of the estate, combined with major social problems. Writing around 2000, an officer of the City Council (Beard 2001) set out these problems. Yet it was clear that at this point the conservation strategy for the estate's regeneration was traditional in nature. Preliminary investigations into orthodox repair techniques had been undertaken and the assumption was seemingly that the use and tenure of the estate would remain unchanged.

However, the scale of the physical and social problems combined with a lack of available finance to invest in social housing ultimately led to a very different regeneration approach. Park Hill was handed over to the niche developers *Urban Splash*, the physical fabric was stripped back to the concrete frame and new flats created, principally for sale. Two television documentaries sought to document this scheme in progress (Forbes 2009, Nixon 2009). What seems evident was that the restoration of Park Hill had become enormously important to English Heritage. English Heritage gave a substantial grant of £500,000 for repairs to the frame (the largest grant it offered in 2007-08) and one of the documentaries shows the English Heritage Chief Executive making a number of visits to the site to check on progress (Forbes 2009). The documentaries also show English Heritage desperately trying to rationalise the radical make-over of the estate as something that can be understood as conservation in increasingly difficult economic circumstances, as recession starts to bite.

We see the outcome of this rationalisation in *Constructive Conservation*, which asserts that the heritage values lay:

not only in the site's history but in the scale and vision of the original council housing scheme, in the expressed reinforced concrete frame and the relationship of the building to the landscape in which it sits. Substantial changes to the internal layout and the infill panels within the frame could therefore be introduced without damaging its historic significance. (p. 14)

This is very different from a traditional AHD and its emphasis on the authenticity of fabric. The scheme attracted criticism in the broadsheet press (Bayley 2009, Hatherley 2009). Bayley was especially withering: in discussing English Heritage's focus on the concrete frame and acceptance of the wholesale removal of other fabric he referred to 'philosophical absurdities', 'absurd archaeological pedantry', 'pseudo-scholarship' and 'intellectual chaos'. Yet critical voices from amongst conservation bodies were noticeably absent. For example, the Twentieth Century Society, very actively campaigning in this period for the listing of the not dissimilar Robin Hood Gardens (see for example, Powers 2010), made no public protest over the level of intervention at Park Hill.

It would be foolish to assume that the sorts of case studies discussed in these documents are not to be frequently found in conservation practice and the practicalities of the hurly burly of urban management and change. What is notable is the wish of English Heritage to highlight them as good practice – demolition, near demolition and façadism would not normally be considered desirable conservation practice. Alongside the AHD of *Conservation Principles* and the AHD of *The Heritage Dividend* we seem to see English Heritage presenting a third variant AHD based on the potential for extreme flexibility of heritage management processes in achieving development outcomes. This is perhaps linked to an underlying insecurity of English Heritage about how it is perceived by developers and its political paymasters. A key positioning of conservation-planning in sustaining its relevance and importance has been to be seen as a socially beneficial agent of change and, conversely, not as an impediment to development.

However, alongside these broad forces that became shaped as an AHD, the Park Hill case study hints that contingent factors might be important and deserve attention in each individual case. With the transformation of Park Hill, a series of elements combine making a particular Park Hill assemblage. The cost of regeneration combined with the low political priority of investing in social housing precluded the repair of the estate with an unchanged tenure pattern. Instead, a more radical solution was embraced that became unstable as the developer pushed a new vision of the estate, building fabric problems were exposed and property markets tumbled. Part of this process was the agency of the building and the way this helped shape the emergent discourse for the estate set out in *Constructive Conservation*.

Thus, whilst the AHD represented in *Conservation Principles* seeks to code and consolidate values and practices along reasonably conventional lines within the conservation-planning assemblage, *The Heritage Dividend* and *Constructive Conservation* present variant AHDs; with the latter in particular deploying a challengingly flexible interpretation of what constitutes acceptable and desirable conservation practice, often far removed from the traditional emphasis on the authenticity of material fabric. This decodes established values. One might have thought it also might have the potential to deterritorialise the assemblage, though there is little evidence of this in practice.

Conclusion

We can understand the practice of English conservation-planning on a number of levels. First, we can critically analyse it, in common with other heritage-based

activity, as values-based and indeed conservation-planning practice tends to share many normative values with other heritage activities. Second, we can see that the conservation-planning sector, and English Heritage in particular, has generated an Authorised Heritage Discourse that is powerful in shaping ideas of what the conservation-planning system should seek to protect and what constitutes legitimate conservation actions and interventions and this is part of a hegemonic power system, self-serving a particular formation of heritage. However, third, on top of this central AHD, perhaps exemplified by *Conservation Principles*, we can see other emergent discourses; for the sake of convenience summarised here as *The Heritage Dividend* and *Constructive Conservation*. Whilst these emerge as tactical responses to external forces, they become internalised and institutionalised in turn. As such, we can also represent these as part of an AHD as they similarly seek to legitimate particular constructions of conservation value and activity. They are perhaps better understood as distinct sub-AHDs as they are addressed to different audiences and, importantly, appear to represent very different heritage values. *Conservation Principles* sets out a contemporary articulation of historically long-established and relatively stable values for use within conservation-planning processes. *The Heritage Dividend* and *Constructive Conservation* on the other hand are aimed principally at audiences external to the conservation-planning assemblage, in government and in the development industry. In putting forward particular representations of conservation – as an active agent of change and a process that is responsive to market demands – they in turn create authorised discourses that are, however, responsive and not easily controlled by their originators. They are also discourses influenced by the particularities of English conservation-planning and the specificities of its political need to demonstrate its worth in contemporary place-management. *Conservation Principles* sets out values familiar across many spheres of conservation activity – those set out in *The Heritage Dividend* and *Constructive Conservation* are much more particular to English conservation-planning.

Whilst stemming from a different ontological tradition from discourse analysis³, seeing conservation-planning as an assemblage helps us describe and understand how these various discourses fit together. Conservation-planning is a distinct social entity whereby discourse interacts with, for example, individuals and organisations, normalised practices and a legal and policy framework. As the Park Hill case study briefly illustrated, the materiality of the buildings and places identified as heritage is also important in constructing the assemblage, its values and discourses. Whilst the conservation-planning assemblage carries values, normalised practices, linguistic components and so on from wider conservation activity, in certain important respects it is located firmly within the domain of town planning. Its legislation and policy, or norms and objects, form part of the planning system and, for example, government policy and statements are important in framing conservation-planning practices. Thus, whilst part of the discourse that swirls around conservation-planning activity relates to discourses of heritage, part of it relates to planning and the raft of other policy goals that relate to the management of the urban environment. This has been important in foregrounding instrumental roles for heritage protection and specifically the necessity, and success, of presenting conservation as being complementary to physical regeneration and economic development; the re-presentation of conservation as an active agent of change. Therefore, whilst on the one hand successive governments have been reinforcing this message through policy and other guidance since the 1980s, equally the assemblage has conveyed this message into other arenas, such as

the formation of the Urban Renaissance agenda under the post-1997 Labour administrations.

English Heritage has had a key role in positioning conservation in this way, but we should note that other conservation bodies, such as SAVE Britain's Heritage, have been active in this sphere. The decoding flexibilities of value English Heritage has on occasion adopted can be contentious but rarely are tensions in the assemblage very visible. And whilst this paper has focused on the particularities of the English case, the need for conservation-planning to engage with processes of capital accumulation, processes of regeneration and so on is evident across market economies world-wide (see for example, Ashworth and Tunbridge 1990, Tiesdell et al. 1996, Pickard 2001, Sutton and Fahmi 2002, Gunay 2010) and indeed the need to demonstrate economic value from conservation activity is of an even greater imperative in more deregulated land-use planning systems, such as the United States (Rypkema 1992).

Considering conservation-planning as an assemblage helps us conceptualise the complexity of the social relationships in this particular sphere of heritage management. It helps draw out the horizontal and shifting power relationships that exist in contestations over the management of places, alongside the hegemonic vertical power relations that also exist within AHDs. In the particular case of conservation-planning, powerful competing economic discourses have influenced conservation discourse and practice and necessitated a careful development and positioning of the AHD by the sector in order to sustain political legitimacy. This has led to a different AHD, or series of sub-AHDs, than might have been self-generated without such external influence. Despite grand rhetorical government statements about the importance of heritage, the sector has constantly felt the need to justify its relevance. As such, it is both in competition with other sectors, within and without the state, and charged with delivering more over-arching public policy goals.

Thus, whilst the narratives that are important in coding the conservation-planning assemblage are related to wider conservation and heritage discourses, there are differences and distinctions. Conservation-planning AHD is, in some respects, different and distinct from other AHDs. This paper has shown how this broader context has had an influence on the narratives of the conservation-planning assemblage and upon shaping how conservation-planning values evolve. Or, put another way, it influences the construction of the AHD which we need to see not just as a self-referential discourse, but in a broader context, competing with and seeking to survive alongside a panoply of different elite interests.

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Notes

1. At the same time, I acknowledge that there is lively debate and contestation over the notion of assemblage: for example, see the special issue of the *Journal of Cultural Economy* edited by Bennett and Healy (2009) or Anderson and McFarlane (2011) for a discussion of the different ways the term is used in geographical scholarship. Anderson and McFarlane highlight the manipulability of assemblage as a concept; 'it can be used as a broad descriptor of disparate actors coming together, as an alternative to notions of network emerging from actor-network theory, as a way of thinking about phenomena as productivist or practice based, as an ethos that attends to the social in formation, and as a means of problematizing origins, agency, politics and ethics' (p.126).
2. In this paper, I also use the conceptualisation and terminology used by DeLanda. He defines three intersecting axes for assemblages, the first two of which relate to the origins of assemblage theory with Deleuze. Axis 1 is concerned with the content of the assemblage and defines the variable roles that an assemblage's components may play, with a material role at one end of the axis and an expressive role at the other end. Axis 2 is concerned with the processes with which the assemblage is involved, with these seen as territorialising (stabilising the identity of the assemblage) or deterritorialising (a destabilising influence). To these DeLanda adds a third axis, defining processes in which specialised expressive media intervene, with coding and decoding the ends of this axis. Coding processes consolidate and rigidify the identity of the assemblage whereas decoding allows the assemblage latitude for more flexible operation.
3. Whilst assemblage theory and related bodies of work such as Actor Network Theory are generally perceived as putting little weight on the constitutive possibilities of language, as a reaction to structuralism, various scholars have sought to combine elements of the two approaches. For example, in the cultural sphere Bennett (2007, p. 615) discusses a 'productive interchange between ANT and Foucauldian theory in its potential to add a denser materiality to Foucault's insistence on the need for an "ascending analysis of power"' and Hillier (2012b, p. 2) argues 'the analytics of process-orientated assemblage thinking offer a capacity to understand the groundings of spatially and temporally rhizomic meshworks of processes and meaning, including the ways in which various logics (such as the AHD) are enacted as systemic'.

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