



AUTHENTICITY STUDIES

International Journal of Archaeology and Art

ISSN 2785-7484

Issue n. 1 / 03.2022

<https://authenticity-studies.padovauniversitypress.it/issue/1/1>

/1.0





UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova
Dipartimento dei Beni Culturali: archeologia, storia dell'arte, del cinema e della musica
Piazza Capitanato, 7 - 35139 Padova (PD)



Iniziativa sostenuta dalla
Fondazione
Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo

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Authenticity Studies. International Journal of Archaeology and Art is an international and independent journal based on a peer review system and dedicated to studying the methods of attribution and authentication of authentic archaeological and historical-artistic artefacts. *Authenticity Studies* is an **open-access electronic journal** (with ISSN). It is based on an anonymous and **international double peer review system**.

Authenticity Studies does not foresee any financial contribution from the Authors or any expenses for the Readers.

Founded by Monica Salvadori (Editor in Chief), Federica Toniolo, Andrea Tomezzoli, Marta Nezzo, Monica Baggio and Luca Zamparo, *Authenticity Studies. International Journal of Archeology and Art* is a journal of the **Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of Padova** and is published by **Padova University Press**.

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Vista frontale del frammento di parapetto messo in vendita il 20 luglio 2020. © HVMC / Bianca Massard.

ISSN 2785-7484

Rivista scientifica in fase di registrazione presso il Tribunale di Padova

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Progettazione ed elaborazione grafica: www.publicad.it



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Fake originals or authentic replicas? Authenticity and conservation practices of historic vehicles

ABSTRACT

The concept of authenticity has been challenged by several authors when applied to cultural heritage. However, little thinking has been devoted to the impact that the shifting concept of authenticity has on conservation practices of mobile heritage (e.g. vintage cars, historic trains, ships, aeroplanes, motorcycles). The topic is explored here through some case studies from Italy and the UK, and will be introduced by a brief summary of the concepts of authenticity and replicas. The paper will highlight a different understanding of the concept of authenticity by collectors and museums, leading to different approaches to conservation practices. The author underlines the difference between “originality” and “authenticity” and suggests that “authenticity” is tied to the perception and experience of cultural heritage, while “originality” is related to the fabric. Even though there is merit in all the different approaches to conservation, conversations on this subject are needed to ensure a streamlining of concepts and vocabulary applied by the different stakeholders.

KEYWORDS. Industrial heritage, conservation, authenticity, historic vehicles.

“Consider a word that refers to a thing – “umbrella”, for example. When I say the word “umbrella”, you see the object in your mind. You see a kind of stick, with collapsible metal spokes on top that form an armature for a waterproof material which, when opened, will protect you from the rain. This last detail is important. Not only is an umbrella a thing, it is a thing that performs a function [...]. When you stop to think of it, every object is similar to the umbrella, in that it serves a function.

A pencil is for writing, a shoe is for wearing, a car is for driving.

Now, my question is this. What happens when a thing no longer performs its function? Is it still the thing or has it become something else? When you rip the cloth off the umbrella, is the umbrella still an umbrella? [...] Is it possible to go one calling this object an umbrella? In general, people do. At the very limit, they will say the umbrella is broken. To me this is a serious error [...]. Because it can no longer perform its function, the umbrella has ceased to be an umbrella. It might resemble an umbrella, it might once have been an umbrella, but now it has changed into something else. The word, however, has remained the same. Therefore, it can no longer express the thing. It is imprecise; it is false; it hides the thing it is supposed to reveal”.

(Paul Auster, *City of Glass*, [1985] 2004, p. 77).

I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is a shifting concept, constantly negotiated and created, thanks to interpretation, by different components of the society. In Western countries, the close association of the concept of cultural heritage with the idea of authenticity has been (and continues to be) the subject of a vibrant scientific debate. Among the different strands of this debate, the impact that different interpretations of cultural heritage in its material and intangible forms have in defining the authenticity of an object is well investigated in the field of cultural heritage studies (see the next paragraph for a brief state of the art). General studies on the issue of authenticity have concentrated in particular on heritage sites and antiquities (Darlington 2020; Holtorf, Schadla-Hall 1999; Schadla-Hall 1999; Baggio *et alii* 2019; Jones 1992). Little thinking – from the field of heritage studies – has been devoted instead to the impact that the shifting concept of authenticity has on conservation practices of mobile heritage (e.g. vintage cars, historic trains, ships, aeroplanes, motorcycles) (with the exception of a section in Holtorf, Schadla-Hall 1999) and indeed mobile heritage is underrepresented in the field of heritage studies, compared to other categories of artifacts. This is the subject of this paper, which will explore the relationship between vintage vehicles and authenticity through case studies from Italy and the UK, as well as from the different points of view of heritage practitioners and collectors. The choice of these countries to conduct this research has been driven by different elements. In both cases, mobile heritage is particularly valued and the comparison between the two allows to trace trends or differences in the approach to authenticity, especially considering that the two countries are governed by different legal frameworks (common/civil law). Italy and the UK are also countries where I have the most extensive knowledge, compared to others in Europe, since I studied and lived in both of them.

Mobile heritage is today a distinct part of cultural heritage in many countries – and to some extent even internationally. In Italy, the industry of mobile heritage is part of the “brand” of the country (think of Ferrari, Lamborghini, Lancia, FIAT, Alfa Romeo, Ducati, Aprilia, and we could go on) and efforts were made to protect this heritage by law (Portulari 2019). According to the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape (D.lgs. 42 issued on 22 January 2004), for example, the exit from national territory of vehicles older than seventy-five years must be authorised by the Ministry of Culture (MiC) (art. 65.3.c). An exception to this rule applies to the temporary exit (for reasons such as exhibitions and international meetings) of historic vehicles specifically declared “cultural heritage” by the Ministry thanks to an administrative act (art. 67.2). This exception is justified by the fact that designated cultural heritage is catalogued, and can therefore be claimed for return to Italy according to international laws and conventions on the subject. The nature of industrial heritage has also been recently considered from a juridical point of view: the court sentenced that objects manufactured in series can be considered cultural heritage (i.e. the rarity / uniqueness is not a necessary condition for an artifact to be deemed “cultural heritage”) (TAR Lombardia, sent. n. 672/17, cited in Portulari 2019).

There are also museums across the national territory devoted to mobile heritage, some focused on a specific brand (e.g. Ferrari Museum in Maranello, MO), some others to wider collections born thanks to the passion for collection of single individuals (e.g. Nicolis Museum, Villafranca di Verona), some others to people involved with the history of races (e.g. Nuvolari Museum in Mantua) or pioneers (e.g. Caproni Museum, Trento). Moreover, some mobile heritage-related events are perceived as historical: it is the case of the Mille Miglia, a race organised from 1927 to 1957. Since 1977, the Mille Miglia has been organised annually as a regularity race, but it is perceived half as a heritage-related event and half as a parade.

In the United Kingdom, mobile heritage is less recognised by law, but is deemed cultural heritage by a significant percentage of the population. A survey carried out by the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs (FBHVC) in 2019 estimated that 40% of the British population thinks that historic vehicles “represent an important part of our heritage and it is important to maintain them” (FBHVC 2019, p. 10). Alongside others, FBHVC is also a member of the Mobile Heritage Advocacy Group within The Heritage Alliance, the umbrella body for heritage organisations in England. Moreover, several visitor attractions in the UK involve mobile heritage, such as trains and historic ships, and several museums on the Second World War or devoted to armed forces host historic aircrafts and vehicles.

In both countries, the recognition of the particular value of historic vehicles led to the introduction of exemptions in terms of environmental parameters that vehicles have to meet in order to freely circulate. However, a difference in the two countries can be seen in the stakeholders involved in the activities around historic vehicles. In Italy, the sector is largely in private hands: most of the collections were born thanks to the passion of single individuals, or to celebrate some brands. In the UK, alongside private collectors we can find NGOs (i.e. trusts, charities) and public bodies¹.

At the international level, the International Federation of Historic Vehicles (*Fédération Internationale des Véhicules Anciens*, FIVA) signed an agreement with UNESCO, thus becoming an accredited organisation. This collaboration led to the organisation of exhibitions and to the formal support given by the intergovernmental organisation to a series of events (e.g. the

Grand Prix in Belgrade, Serbia²). Another international body interested in historic vehicles is the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH), an accredited consulting organisation for the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

The concepts of authenticity, replicas, copies and forgery in this field have a huge economic effect – as it happens with other works of art. In the case of historic vehicles, this economic effect is manifold. First of all, the owners of historic vehicles have fiscal benefits in many countries. For example, in Italy owners of classic cars are exempted from a tax on circulation, and obtain a discount on insurance costs. Secondly, the value of these items increases with the passing of time; in fact, vintage cars are perceived in Italy as “safe investments” for the future (similarly to other works of art, gold, and diamonds). This increase is directly related to the “authenticity” of the object: for example, vintage cars used few times and never repaired cost more than others heavily repaired. This can be clearly seen in international auctions. In the description of their items on sale, Bonhams for example includes sentences like: “Original coachwork”, “Off the road [dates³]”. The auctions and the car sellers also share information on the chassis number to prevent fraud (both selling/buying stolen cars, and forgeries). A forged classic car, in fact, loses its economic value.

Hence, historic vehicles are a part of the heritage and are usually subject to constant conservation practices (even *before* becoming historic and therefore “heritage”). How does the concept of authenticity affect these practices in the different environments (before and after becoming “historic”, or inside and outside a museum for example)? Where are the boundaries of the concepts of authenticity and replica in this context?

The topic is explored here through some small case studies from Italy and the UK, and will be introduced by a very brief summary of the concepts of authenticity and replicas. This research was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, and the limitations in place restricted my ability to travel and personally visit collections/museums. Therefore, my methodology has been based entirely on interviews, mainly conducted by phone or through digital platforms such as Zoom⁴.

II. AUTHENTICITY AND HERITAGE

Authenticity is a tricky concept. Reflecting on it is a long-standing item of interest in the field of heritage studies. A comprehensive literature review would exceed the space of this paper, and it is not its scope anyway. However, it is worth remembering some major steps in the scholarly thinking about this topic, and how these have affected conservation practices.

Issues on the notion of authenticity and how it affects conservation practices have been studied first and foremost in relation to places (and buildings). Even though the tension between different concepts of authenticity and conservation practices found two opposite champions in the architects Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin at the end of the nineteenth century (Choay 2001), it became of primary importance in the debates on reconstruction after the destruction of the Second World War, which went on until the 1980s (see the Declaration of Dresden, ICOMOS 1982). Famous examples are Ypres in Belgium (De Naeyer 1982) and Warsaw in Poland. In this historical context, it is no coincidence that the debate on authenticity became central in the

framework of the then recently born UNESCO and of the scientific debate, with the production of the Venice Charter (ICOMOS 1964). Here, the concept of “restoration” is based both on values and (especially) on the fabric (art. 9), but “all periods to the building of a monument must be respected” (art. 11) and the reconstructed parts should be clearly distinguishable (art. 15). The notion set in the Venice Charter was also used in the Operational Guidelines (UNESCO 1977) of the so called World Heritage Convention (Paris, UNESCO 1972), which privileged a sense of authenticity linked to the fabric (“design, materials, workmanship and setting”, para. 9). The concept has been widely challenged both by some of the nominations, such as Warsaw (Cameron 2008), and by scholars as it is tied to Western values and discourses about heritage (Smith 2006, pp. 87-102; Waterton 2010). This issue was addressed in 1994 by the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS 1994), which emphasised the need to consider the cultural context and the different understanding of “authenticity” (“heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong”, art. 11) (McBryde 1997). The Riga Charter (ICCROM 2000) shifted the focus of attention from fabric to “significance” (Stovel 2001), but failed its intention to go further when it said that “replication of cultural heritage is in general a misrepresentation of evidence of the past, and that each architectural work should reflect the time of its own creation”. Notwithstanding the peculiarity of the Eastern notion of authenticity (Byrne 2014), recent comparative studies have highlighted the complexity and theoretical interlinking of conservation practices in both East and West. On the one hand, the Western discourse influenced Eastern practices; on the other hand the intangible values play a key role also in the West (Gao, Jones 2020). A notion of authenticity of places connected to the values of the citizens that inhabit them has also been proposed (Rodwell 2016), but the debates in the field of urbanism, architecture and heritage studies are continuously evolving.

The Burra Charter issued by ICOMOS, last revised in 2013 (Australia ICOMOS 2013), still provides an international framework for the definition of the terms related to the care of cultural heritage (art. 1). The Charter distinguishes “conservation” from “preservation”. The first is linked to the cultural significance (of a place, as the Charter is related to places), the second is more related to the fabric (“maintaining a place in its existing state and retarding deterioration”). It also differentiates “restoration” from “reconstruction”: the former aims at “returning a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing elements *without the introduction of new material*” (emphasis added); the latter involves the introduction of new material. In this paper we will adopt this vocabulary but clarify the different uses that these words can have outside the ICOMOS/heritage-expert context. It is worth noting, however, that with industrial heritage there is an element of consumable items that necessarily have to be periodically replaced with new ones. In the case of historic vehicles for example, these include (but are not limited to) tyres, motor oil, and spark plugs.

A black & white definition has been applied for a long time to the concept of authenticity in the context of cultural objects: either the object is authentic or it is not, and therefore it loses its status, becoming in the best case scenario a copy, either a *replica*, probably a more appropriate term considering that this paper deals with serial works, or a *forgery*, when the producer’s intention is to deceive for different reasons (see Darlington 2020). In this sense, it is useful to recall Dutton’s definition of “nominal authenticity” as “the correct identification of the origins, authorship, or provenance of an object, ensuring, as the term implies, that an object of aesthetic

experience is properly named” (Dutton 2003, p. 259). There is a huge part of scientific literature linked to the art and antiquities market (which we will not explore since – again – this is out of the scope of this paper) devoted to techniques useful to identify replicas and forgeries. Despite the loss of economic value compared to authentic objects, replicas and fakes are still valuable from a historical point of view: the reasons behind the choice to replicate or to forge cultural objects in a specific period tell a story that deserves to be explored (Baggio *et alii* 2019; Campbell 2021; Jones 1992). And yet, as I will explore, even this concept of “nominal authenticity” can be challenged when considering mobile heritage and industrial heritage, i.e. objects produced in series.

Recently, in relation to cultural objects some scholars have explored the concept of replica and the notion of authenticity. What seems to be an oxymoron at first sight, is instead proven by ethnographic research, which shows that authenticity is a matter of perception, tied to personal experiences (Foster, Jones 2019). Dutton refers in this case to “expressive authenticity”, as linked to audiences (Dutton 2003).

When considering vintage vehicles in a paper about authenticity, Cornelius Holtorf and Tim Schadla-Hall underlined the importance of the drivers’ experience, which forces the concept of authenticity, using the example of Harley-Davidson motorcycles:

“The authentic sound and vibrations from the big V-twin motor are important parts of the ‘cult’, but they are dependent on old technical solutions: as a result, everything shakes loose quickly and requires the skills of the lone ‘rider’ who can repair his ‘horse’. Today, a small industry supplies proud Harley-Davidson owners with reproduced spare parts that guarantee the authenticity of both bike and rider. [...] Specialist dealers and Harley-Davidson enthusiasts also trade extensively with original parts. In effect, a modern owner of an ancient Harley-Davidson can ride a rebuilt and customized Motorbike that may consist of more authentic parts than it did when it arrived new from the factory” (Holtorf, Schadla-Hall 1999, pp. 237-238).

Experience and perception, as we will see, play an important role in the collectors’ sense of “authenticity”.

THE COLLECTORS’ POINT OF VIEW

I was five in 1992 when my father bought a Mercedes 190SL dated to 1956. Previously owned by a Moroccan prince, when my father brought the car to Italy, it was in such a state that I hardly could call it a car. It was completely dismantled, of an awkward (to my childish eyes) dark orange/reddish colour, with a lot of rusty pieces, not all properly functioning. Since then, my father – a mechanical engineer – has worked on the car for three years, using his spare time. This involved quite a few trips to trade shows to search for some components, and quite a lot of evenings, nights and weekends spent on designing some of the parts to then be produced locally, as the

original components could not be found anywhere. At the end of the painstaking process, the car could circulate again, and I still remember the emotion of getting on that car for the first time in our garden. After that experience, my father changed job and started his own company devoted to the “restoration” of classic cars (Mercedes Benz for the most) and motorcycles. In the context of vintage cars owned by private collectors, the word “restoration” is used with a notion different to the ICOMOS one, as I will explore.

In his everyday practice, priority is given to preserving the original components of the car by cleansing them or repairing them. However, in order to make the car work again this is not always enough, and some parts have to be replaced. When clients’ resources permit it, his first attempt is to replace the broken/poorly functioning components with the same ones taken from other cars. Some cars in fact, whose conditions are so poor that prevent repair, are “cannibalized” (his word) to feed other cars. The components obtained from “cannibalized” cars are original (same manufacture, same period of production) and the first car is still perceived as “original” and “authentic”. “After all, this is what also happens when the car is quite new” he said, making the example of my own car, which had the boot lid replaced with another one, coming from a car which had a bad accident.

When it is too expensive for the client to buy an “original” (old) component or it is impossible to find cars to cannibalize, my father produces the components. The mechanics is exactly the same, but the tools to make them are obviously different, and the materials are often not the same: “I could use the same materials for this component, but we know that they don’t last very long” he said. Since repairing vintage cars is an expensive process, owners do not want to be forced to go through it all over again after few years because of the materials used. It strikes noting that some of these components are bought by Mercedes Benz industry itself, if the items are out of stock and not produced anymore by its factories. The components are purchased as replicas – for obvious reasons related to industrial property and ethics.

It is interesting to note that the cars restored using these pieces obtain the certificate of “historic vehicles” released by the Italian agency in charge for declaring classic cars as “historic”, Automotoclub Storico Italiano (ASI, which means Italian Historic Club for cars and motorcycles). The parts replaced are not declared anywhere because this is not required. Certainly, every expert in vintage cars can easily spot the “brand new” pieces, but it is impossible to distinguish the components coming from “cannibalized” cars. And indeed, from the collectors’ point of view there is no difference between the original components of the vehicle and other components coming from other vintage cars: they are all “original” and it would be absolutely pointless (from their point of view) to distinguish them. When it comes to selling one of these cars, the fact that it has been restored does not cause a reduction in price or a different perception of “authenticity”, as it is almost taken for granted that every car had some pieces replaced over its lifetime. Indeed, broadly speaking the ASI adopts the same approach taken by my father⁵: priority is given to conservation, but it is completely acceptable to replace some components of a car which otherwise could not be used any longer. The ASI officer I interviewed admitted that sometimes the resulting effect is that of a “shiny lollipop”, which is not what they aim for, but what the public wants – especially in parades and *concours d’élégance*. In these contests, the “restoration” of the car (which is what the Burra Charter would call “reconstruction”) can be pushed even beyond the mint conditions.

What I want to stress here is that the philosophy that my father, as well as the vast majority of the other collectors (his clients and those who apply for certification to ASI), adopt in preservation is rooted in the concept of functionality, similarly to the quote by Paul Auster cited at the beginning of this paper: “a car is for driving”. If it cannot be driven anymore, it is legitimate to do all you can to make it work again, as the *experience* is the key point.

“Authentic” is not a familiar word to my father and his clients-collectors when speaking about cars. They rather refer to the concept of “originality”. “When do you stop then? – I asked – How many parts do you have to replace with brand new ones to consider the car a replica of the original? Fifty per cent? Ninety per cent?”. He answered that this debate among those who restore vintage vehicles is quite alive and it is almost impossible to have an answer valid for everyone. “Any percentage would end up being arbitrary. Someone says that until you have the part with the original chassis number, the car is still original”, he said. Interesting times ahead for future heritage conservators dealing with classic cars, having to make choices on the conservation of these vehicles, and to explain to the public what is original and what is not...

IV. THE MUSEUM APPROACH

More diversified approaches can be seen in museums, and one of the reasons behind this diversity lies in the origin of the collections. As mentioned in the introduction, some of the museums are large private collections open to the public, and the approach taken is the one described in the previous section. Indeed, this particular type of heritage has not been recognised as “heritage” by museum professionals and conservators until fairly recently⁶. Therefore, the idea to bring a vehicle back to mint conditions has long been applied (Collum 2019).

Other approaches can be seen in museums born with exhibition and educational purposes, or which adopted heritage-related curatorial practices.

This is the case for example of the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Yeovilton (UK), which is part of the National Museum of the Royal Navy⁷. The collection of the museum includes aircrafts of the fleet that formed part of the Royal Navy. The curator of the museum, Dave Morris, applies “object critical thinking” to the conservation (NB not “restoration”!) practices of the artefacts of the collection (cf. Morris 2019). The purpose of conservation in this case is not to make the aircrafts fly, nor to make them look perfect. During our interview, Dave Morris mentioned two aircrafts re-painted in the 1960s-70s by the former curators to bring them back to mint conditions and make them look shiny, in line with the collectors’ attitude described above. Luckily (from a modern heritage curator’s point of view) the painters were not very accurate and added the layer of paint above the original one. In 2000, as the paint of the 1960s-70s started to become friable, the conservation board decided to scrap it off the aircrafts exposing the original paint. As part of the “object critical thinking”, they reflected on their steps: even though the “restoration” of the 1960s-70s was still part of the life of the object, they finally decided that the original paint, yet degraded, was able to tell a more interesting story to the public. Also, he stressed the importance of being honest with the visitors, and declaring what is *rebuilt* (even if “very close to the original”) and what is *original*. We will not delve too much into this attitude, which

will be well known by the curators of heritage museums. However, during our interview, Dave Morris mentioned an interesting case study related to a Barracuda, which is worth exploring a bit more. The aircraft Barracuda was used during the Second World War by one of the squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm and it seems that no complete exemplar of Barracuda survives, as they were destroyed. Since this is quite an important aircraft for the story that the museum aims to tell, the board considered the opportunity to build a replica, but then decided to undertake – in Dave Morris’ words – a process similar to “archaeological remodelling”. Since the crash sites of various Barracudas are known, the museum acquired the permission to recover the components – needed according to the current legislation (see Benetti, Brogiolo 2020) – and to evaluate if a percentage of said components could be used to build a credible reconstruction for exhibition and education purposes. Potentially, if all the components were collected from various crash sites, an aircraft could be reconstructed from scratch using original components. It would be original, and yet would it be “nominally authentic”, considering that such an aircraft never existed – even if it *could* have existed, given the originality of the pieces. “Origins, authorship and provenance” – concepts which Dutton ties to “nominal authenticity” are still not enough here. All the pieces would come from the factories and would be original. In the case of industrial heritage, would it be necessary also to make reference to the date when the pieces were assembled? Though we should recognise that it may be virtually impossible to distinguish the different date of assemblage. We could argue that this “paradox” is due to the particular nature of industrial heritage, with pieces manufactured in series. Here “originality” and “authenticity” clearly diverge and better framing of the concept of “authenticity” is needed in the field of industrial heritage. However, this can also happen with other types of heritage, for example with historic buildings. When we look close enough, most of our historic buildings are not really “authentic”, as they were repaired, restored, partially rebuilt even several times through their history. Some of these repairs may even have used original pieces: for example, in Italy some companies that sell earthenware tiles dated to the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries (coming from demolished buildings) to be used to pave historic buildings dated to the same period. When we look close enough, the concept of “authenticity” becomes blurred. But, again, we could see a diverging choice: if the building was a museum, this intervention would be clearly declared, while an owner would probably not be bothered to disclose it. What I argue is that – similarly to what happens with vintage vehicles – this is not the result of a different attitude towards honesty, but a different understanding of the concept of authenticity. In the collectors’ attitude, “authenticity” lies in the experience and “originality” in the fabric. The museum (and more in general the “heritigisation” process) creates an environment where the experience of objects is mediated, and the concept of authenticity can be challenged. In most cases vehicles that are part of museum collections cannot be driven or flown, and this happens also in Italy, for example at the Museum of the Air at St Pelagio Castle (Due Carrare, Padova, north Italy). The Historical Aeronautical Museum of Vigna di Valle (Rome) is owned by the Italian Ministry of Defence and has a similar policy, and their website specifies that conservation work on aircrafts is carried out using “whenever possible” the materials and techniques available at the time of the production of the aircrafts⁸.

Going back to the quote by Paul Auster at the beginning of this paper: “Now, my question is this. What happens when a thing no longer performs its function? Is it still the thing or has it become something else?”: we could reply that it sometimes becomes *heritage*.

V. CONCLUSION

Authenticity is not an intrinsic characteristic of an object, but it is a flexible idea. Especially in the case of industrial heritage, “authenticity” and “originality” are different concepts, the former being a superstructure tied to perception, the latter being linked to intrinsic characteristics of objects (in the case of industrial heritage, related to a particular manufacture and period of production). As J. Darlington remarks, “Perception vary, so authenticity or truth cannot be absolute” (Darlington 2020, p. 200). Dutton’s concept of “expressive authenticity” is again stretched as the audiences are different (collectors, curators, visitors). The perception of the objects that visitors can have from a museum is different to the one which comes from a direct experience of use. In this sense, it would be useful for heritage practitioners to clearly differentiate the concepts. As the idea of “authenticity” has been challenged under many points of view, as practitioners we should wonder if the use of this category of thought still makes sense when applied at least to some types of heritage, such as industrial heritage.

As I demonstrated, the emphasis (or not) on experience has significant consequences also on conservation practices and the prioritisation of the different functions makes the difference. Conservation, restoration, rebuilding/re-making processes are common both for collectors and for museums, and it is important to stress that there is merit in all these processes; there is no right or wrong. However, I suggest that more frequent conversations should take place between the different stakeholders to establish common frameworks, protocols, vocabularies, especially when considering industrial heritage which, for its nature, has components manufactured in series (cf. Morris 2019). This is urgent if we consider that vintage vehicles which are now owned by a private citizen, could be acquired in the near future by museums as they start becoming material remains of the past and the stories that some vehicles can tell are powerful. Some of these vehicles are already being considered heritage, in Italy also by law. Interestingly, even if heritage law normally gives importance to the value of “rarity” (or uniqueness), in the case of mobile and industrial heritage the Italian court recognised that “duplicates” (something we could expect since objects were produced in series) are still valuable and deemed to be declared cultural heritage (Portulari 2019, pp. 38-39). But should we consider the Barracuda mentioned above a “duplicate”? A replica? A *pastiche*? And what about the cars examined in section 3 of this paper repaired with components coming from other historic vehicles? Nothing says that replicas cannot be declared “cultural heritage” by law, and indeed several cases have shown the value of replicas (Foster, Jones 2019; Darlington 2020, ch. 3), but as heritage practitioners we should seek more clarity about this. Is it possible to find a point of contact between collectors and heritage practitioners? Even if we tie this concept to the *significance* of the vehicles, this preliminary research demonstrated that stakeholders value different aspects, such as the personal experience of a vehicle or the story that mobile heritage is able to tell – and there is merit in both of them.

Exploring the changing perception of authenticity is not only a fascinating theoretical exercise, but may also have an economic impact. In auctions of vintage cars there is not (yet) a clear vocabulary that establishes a hierarchy in the “originality” or “authenticity” (even in the sense of the fabric). This happens instead with the art market, which has always been concerned with

the issue of attribution (upon which the concept of “authenticity” is based in the art market) and created a series of well-established formulas (“authentic”, “attributed to”, “school of”, etc.).

I am fully aware that the case studies presented in this paper are just scratching the surface of a huge topic, but I hope that this preliminary study will be able to foster a reflection in the field of heritage studies on the conservation of industrial heritage; a topic for those who are willing to engage with “Industrial (public) archaeology”.

This paper would not have been possible without my father and all our chats about vintage cars (he has been interviewed several times). Thanks also to Tim Schadla-Hall, who pointed me to the case of Yeovilton, and the interviewees, Vittorio Valbonesi, Luke Jules, Dave Morris, and Liliana Vanzan. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers who provided useful comments to improve this paper; all mistakes and misunderstandings are my own.

These reflections were stimulated by a Heritage Chat, a monthly 1-hour conversation on Twitter between heritage practitioners, which in August 2020 was devoted to “Replicas as a means of creating “living” heritage, interpretation and understanding”.

Notes

- ¹ Some historic vehicles are owned by the Ministry of Defence, but are not necessarily available for the public and can be used for training purposes (Flight Lieutenant Luke Jules, RAF Air and Space Warfare School, pers. comm.).
- ² <https://fiva.org/en/unesco-patronage-for-the-belgrade-grand-prix/> (accessed 29 September 2020).
- ³ This adds to other characteristics that increase the value of classic cars, such as participation to races, ownership (the fewer owners the better), rarity, among other factors. See www.bonhams.com (accessed 15 October 2020).
- ⁴ The interviews were based on open ended questions after the explanation of the topics of my research, but I encouraged the interviewees to talk freely. Each interview ranged between 20 and 45 minutes. Specific questions were asked to better clarify the points raised by the interviewees. As part of this preliminary research, I interviewed two heritage practitioners, three collectors / engineers and one pilot (names disclosed in the acknowledgments). The interviews were not recorded for privacy reasons, but I took notes over their course.
- ⁵ My gratitude goes to Vittorio Valbonesi, president of the National Technical Commission for Cars, who kindly accepted to be interviewed.
- ⁶ This may be related to the progressive expansion of the concept of cultural heritage over the last century. However, we will not delve into the motivations to consider industrial artifacts as heritage as this is not the subject of this paper (which starts from the assumption that historic vehicles can be – and indeed are – considered “heritage”).
- ⁷ I sincerely thank Dave Morris, Curator of Aircraft at the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Yeovilton, who kindly accepted to be interviewed.
- ⁸ <http://www.aeronautica.difesa.it/storia/museostorico/Pagine/Conservazioneerestauro.aspx> (accessed 08 January 2021).

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Edizione / 1.0
Anno 2022

