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RECONSTRUCTION AND RESISTANCE

ON MATERIAL AUTHENTICITY

GABRI VAN TUSSENBROEK

Should heritage professionals resist reconstructions? In the case of building elements, gables or interiors they clearly should, because the historical substance of the existing building is at stake. But when it involves the complete reconstruction of something that has been lost through wilful demolition, war or some other calamity, things are not quite so straightforward. Such reconstructions possess no historical layering and have a different craftsmanly and architectural quality from the buildings that served as model.[1] They are, in short, new creations, lacking unity of time, place and function. Nevertheless, proposals for these kinds of reconstruction generally provoke impassioned reactions among heritage professionals and architectural historians.[2]

NO NEW HARINGSPAKKERSTOREN

In Amsterdam the debate about the reconstruction of the Haringspakkerstoren is still fresh in people's memory (fig. 1).[3] The tower, which was demolished in 1829, served later generations as a daunting example of how not to deal with historical buildings. Yet in 2006 its proposed reconstruction was the subject of bitter debate: the Amsterdamse Maatschappij tot Stadsherstel (Amsterdam Association for Urban Restoration, founded in 1956) wanted to celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary by reconstructing the tower as a gift to the city.[4] In the gap left by its absence, they argued, 'the neighbourhood had lost its roots'.[5]

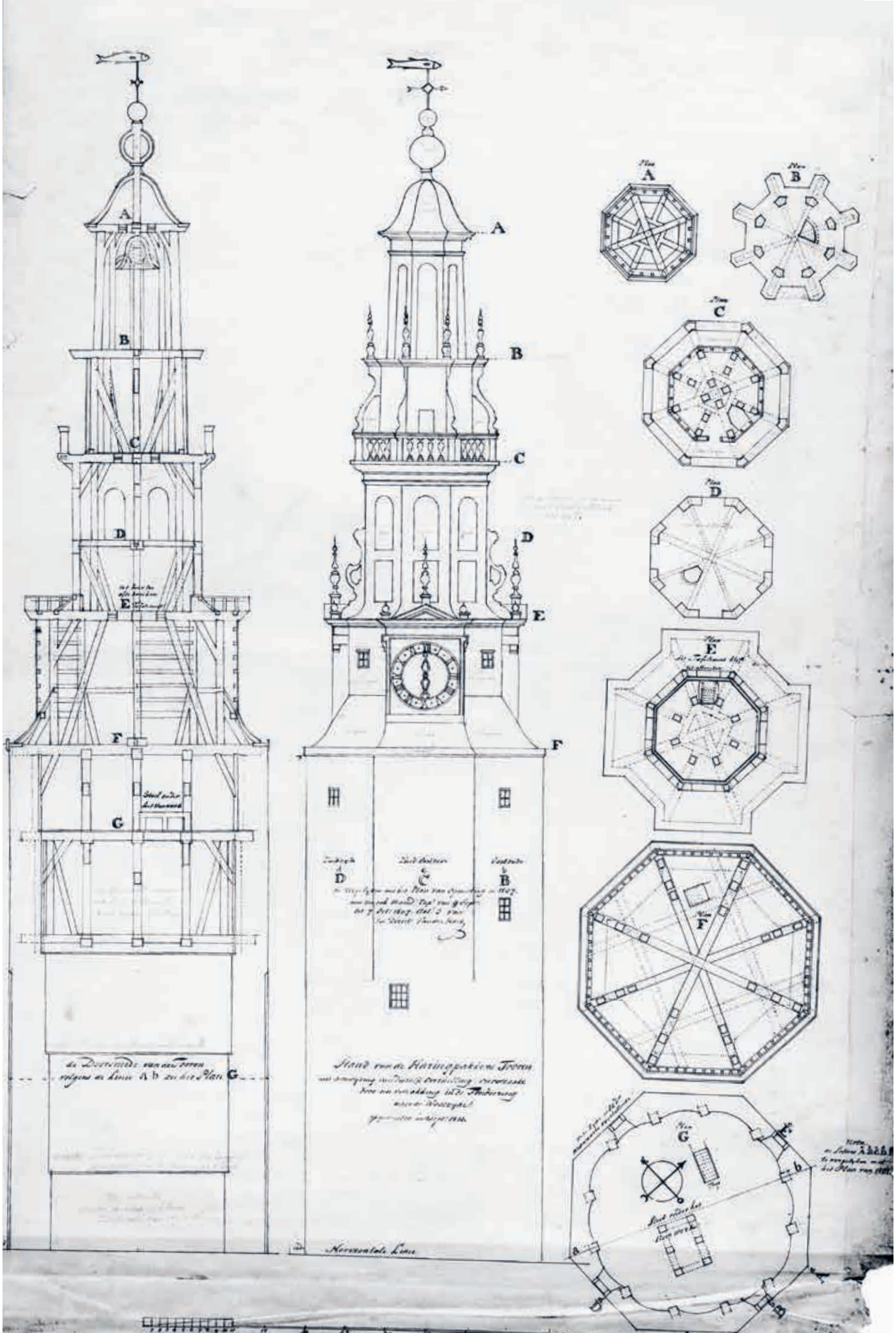
Maarten Kloos, architect and former director of Architectuurcentrum Amsterdam, roundly dismissed the reconstruction of the Haringpakkerstoren as nonsense, arguing that the project afforded nothing new in spatial terms and that the tower would never have the patina and self-evident consistency of an old building: 'there can never be any question of authenticity'.[6] But for proponents of the plan it was not about material originality, but about the historical *form*. Setting aside whether it is possible to distinguish between the two, art historian Wim Vroom was unconvinced as well: he defended reconstructions in cases of dire necessity, for example following war damage, but Amsterdam had no need of the Haringpakkerstoren and its reconstruction would in his view serve only as a tourist attraction.[7]

Ironically enough, it was the heritage status of Amsterdam's city centre that ultimately proved fatal to the reconstruction plans because they represented an obstacle to the city's inclusion in the World Heritage List. In UNESCO's view historicizing new constructions earned a black mark. By 2009, therefore, the political will to support the reconstruction had dwindled to almost nothing.

Nevertheless, various arguments can be advanced in favour of the reconstruction of vanished buildings: alongside aesthetic or economic considerations, an architecturally reconstructed memory can restore religious or political continuity, a national or regional memory, or the memory of individuals.[8]

The main concern of construction and architectural historians, whose work depends on the existence of material sources, is that reconstruction should not lead to the loss of any valuable built substance. Should

► 1. Amsterdam, measuring of the leaning Haringpakkerstoren, Abraham van der Hart, September 1813 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)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that indeed be so, then it is time to mount the barricades. This is a matter of tackling things in the proper order. However, in the vast majority of cases the object to be reconstructed has already long vanished from the earth's surface. In such cases reconstruction is effectively a matter of a new construction. And this is why arguments based on the theoretical principles of heritage preservation, which advocate the preservation of age-related and evidential values and of historical built substance, are rarely pertinent.[9] The reality is that if wholesale reconstruction is under consideration, those values no longer exist physically.

HAGGLING OVER AUTHENTICITY

Once the first European archaeologists had started to delve into the significance of remnants of the past, they gradually developed a theoretical framework encompassing concepts like authenticity and issues such as how buildings should be treated during restorations.[10] An important motivation for that theory development was the preservation of material authenticity. Just as excavated fossils are palaeontologists' most important source of knowledge about extinct organisms, so ancient, medieval and later buildings are primary sources for historians of construction and architecture wanting to discover how people built in those periods. Those who believe that other forms of authenticity (such as contextual, conceptual, visual, historical, ahistorical and functional authenticity) should also be taken into account will no doubt come up with new ideas regarding the interpretation and treatment of historical sources.[11] But this is after all about evaluation and interpretation in the present day. Anyone who fails to distinguish between the material and intangible aspects is like the grocer who believes that a persuasive packaging is an adequate representation of biscuits on the shelves, forgetting that the consumer will have to buy their actual biscuits elsewhere.

The fact that the material aspects are not always paramount in heritage preservation is largely attributable to a separation that has crept in between scientific researchers, who depend on primary source material, and heritage conservators and policy makers, for whom practical engagement with that source material in the spatial domain is paramount. In recent decades we have seen a trend towards the 'dissolution of the real monument'.[12] The evaluation of material remnants of the past has been destabilized since the Nara Conference on Authenticity in 1994. The resulting Nara Declaration was the product of a desire 'to bring greater respect for cultural and heritage diversity to conservation practice'. Nara concluded that the concept of authenticity should be evaluated from the perspective of the cultural context to which it belongs. Within that context a heritage object can be judged authentic not just on the basis of credible historical sources and material, but also on the basis of sources that testify to authentic aspects like function, design, tradition and spiritual or social value.[13]

According to this way of thinking everything is possible as long as the story of the 'outstanding values' can be credibly and truthfully *recounted* from the perspective of the culture concerned. This concept and definition of heritage deviates fundamentally from the traditional concept. Although the Nara document references the concept of authenticity in the 1964 Charter of Venice, which is founded on the material authenticity of a building regarded as a historical document, it ignores the scientific methods used to investigate historical structures, methods that do not differ fundamentally regardless of whether the material remains are from the Berlin Wall or the Great Wall of China.

(IL)LEGITIMATIONS OF RECONSTRUCTIONS

With a semblance of theoretical speculation about what we might understand by authenticity, it doesn't take long to arrive at a legitimation of a reconstruction.[14] According to UNESCO, a reconstruction can only be based on complete and detailed information and never on conjecture.[15] But the 'suggestion that a design or detailed documentation always and repeatedly licenses reconstruction, as a score does for the performance of a piece of music', is false.[16] There are at least eight replicas of the White House Oval Office in the United States (fig. 2). But there is only one genuine Oval Office and it is in the White House. A reconstruction is always a retrospective interpretation; a designed ideal of the past using the means and possibilities – along with the preconceptions – of the present. Historical heritage whose material authenticity is beyond dispute would be at risk if this musical score analogy were to supplant material authenticity.[17]

In some recent restorations carried out in the Netherlands it is difficult to distinguish between restoration and reconstruction.[18] There have also been a few complete reconstructions. In the reconstruction of the Rietveld Pavilion in the sculpture park of the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, and in the reconstruction of J.J.P Oud's Kiefhoek housing estate in Rotterdam, the architectural concept took precedence over the historical material. What these examples have in common is that the original design and the aesthetics of the building weighed more heavily than the preservation of historical materiality. Such a decision is informed by the condition of the building and the feasibility of salvaging the original material. This is not to say that a reconstruction cannot have any aesthetic value, or be a meaningful re-creation of the typology, the function, et cetera. But it is *staged authenticity* and

2. Replica of the Oval Office in the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan (author's photo)

incapable of conjuring up any material authenticity in a historical sense.[19]

Fortunately, the value judgements made by the architects and heritage professionals involved in the above-mentioned examples were based on expert knowledge and free of any political motivations. But we only have to look across the border to see how differently it might play out. The reconstruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden necessitated the demolition of the ruin of that church, which had been cherished since 1945 as a *Mahnmal* or cautionary memorial.[20] For the reconstruction of the Potsdam City Palace, the post-war history of this part of Potsdam was erased. The most distressing case is the reconstruction of the Berlin City Palace (*Stadtschloss*), the remains of which were blown up in 1950 to make way for the parliament of the fledgling East German state (fig. 3). After the fall of the Wall in 1989 there were calls for the City Palace to be rebuilt. A decision to do so was finally taken in 2002 and construction commenced in 2010. This reconstruction in turn required the demolition of the GDR's Palast der Republik. In terms of construction technology, architecture and functional value, the importance of the Palast was not confined to German history. It had even greater significance as a symbol of the Cold War. In the debates about its fate, the fact that this GDR parliament building, along with the largely demolished Berlin Wall, was the most important structure of communist Germany was subordinated to the reconstruction of the vanished city palace. The wilful intent to demolish the Palast der Republik equalled that of half a century earlier when the City Palace was dynamited into oblivion. Even after 1989, the determination to erase the traces of the past prevailed.[21]

In the long run, the domination of conceptual approaches (see the above-mentioned categories of authenticity) has a negative impact on the way we deal

3. The Berlin Stadtschloss (City Palace) under (re)construction, July 2016 (author's photo)

with material heritage.[22] The devaluation of scientific, physical material sources places that material heritage in a narrative context. And by this I do not just mean interpretation: it becomes vulnerable to ideological framing Heritage preservation policy is at risk of becoming increasingly focused on context, on stories and intangible aspects. This can assume innocent forms and consist of genuine attempts to interpret and give meaning to phenomena of the past. But in its most extreme form – when demolition of a surviving fragment becomes part of the reconstruction process – it can also lead to radical and brutal decisions, because the stone artefact from the past is declared a symbol that must be destroyed.

NOTES

1 S. Stroux, '"Kein ästhetisches Heil, außer im Alterswert?" Over het actuele Duitse reconstructiedebat', *Bulletin KNOB* 114 (2015), 84-101, 94-95.

2 A. von Buttlar et al., *Denkmalpflege statt Attrappenkult. Gegen die Rekonstruktion von Baudenkmälern – eine Anthologie,* Berlin/ Basel 2011. But see also: U. Hassler and W. Nerdinger (eds.), *Das Prinzip Rekonstruktion*, Zurich 2010, in which some argue that reconstruction is in fact one of heritage protection's tasks. Cf. S. Stroux et al. (eds.), *Recomomo. Hoe echt is namaak, hoe dierbaar het origineel?*, Delft 2011. Somewhat older, but also about the attitude of heritage professionals to reconstruction following total destruction due to disaster, is Wim Denslagen, *Nostalgie en modernisme in de monumentenzorg*, Utrecht 1999.

3 M. Kloos, 'Terugbouwen. Wat een vreselijk woord!', *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 93 (2006) 1, 22-26; W. Vroom, 'De Haringpakkerstoren: liever niet', *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 93 (2006) 1, 27-29.

4 W. Denslagen, 'Discordia turrium', *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 93 (2006) 1, 3-10, 7. See also G. Frankfurther, 'Stadsherstel investeert in de toekomst van Amsterdam', idem, 19-21.

5 P. van Well, 'De Haringpakkerstoren herrijst. Geschiedenis en herbouwplan', *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 93 (2006) 1, 11-18, 15.
6 Kloos 2006 (note 3), 25.
7 Vroom 2006 (note 3), 27.
8 W. Nerdinger, 'Warum wurde und wird rekonstruiert. Rekonstruktion als politische, ideologische oder ästhetische Handlung', in: Hassler and Nerdinger 2010 (note 2), 14-29. Cf. W. Schoonenberg, 'Without Reconstruction, No Inner City', in: L. Deben, W. Salet and M.-T. van Thoor (eds.), *Cultural Heritage and the Future of the Historic Inner City of Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 2004, 133-148. There have been much more recent reconstructions where it is reasonable to ask whether preservation was not an option. V. van Rossem, 'Cum laude', *Binnenstad* 41 (2007), 223-224, 52-53.
9 Cf. Stroux 2015 (note 1), 92.
10 W.F. Denslagen, *Omstreden herstel. Kritiek op het restaureren van monumenten. Een thema uit de architectuurgeschiedenis van Engeland, Frankrijk, Duitsland en Nederland* (1779-1953), The Hague 1987; A. Hubel, 'Der "Generalkonstervator" Alois Riegl. Verdichtung des Denkmalbegriffs durch die Erfahrungen in der Praxis', in: A. Hubel, *Kunstgeschichte und Denkmalpflege. Ausgewählte Aufsätze. Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag*, Petersberg 2005, 217-230.
11 Cf. W. Denslagen, 'Authenticiteit en spiritualiteit', *Bulletin KNOB* 109 (2010) 4, 135-140, 138; H. Ronnes, 'Authenticiteit en authenticiteitsbeleving. De presentatie en receptie van museum Paleis Het Loo', *Bulletin KNOB* 109 (2010) 5, 190-199.
12 M. Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement. A History of Architectural Preservation*, Abingdon 2013, variously described as the 'dissolution of the real monument' (423), and 'dissolving authenticity' (429). See also M. Kuipers, 'Authenticiteit versus Attrappenkult?', in: Stroux et al. 2011 (note 2), 8-11, 10-11.
13 Article 13 of the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) states: 'Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined.' Cf. G. van Tussenbroek, *The Myth of Immutability. Shifting opinions on listed buildings in Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 2015, 20.
14 On heritage values see: D. Boesler, 'Werte und Wertewandel in der Denkmalpflege', *Die Denkmalpflege* 69 (2011) 1, 5-10.
15 UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, 27 (version 10 July 2019); Denslagen 2010 (note 11), 138.
16 D.J. de Vries, *Verbrokkeld verleden*, Leiden 2001, 3-4.
17 Cf. A. de Swaan, 'The Fetish of Authenticity', in: L. Deben, W. Salet and M.-T. van Thoor 2004 (note 8), 35-42, 39: 'Without this fetish of authenticity the theoretical foundations of the preservation movement are not very strong and they have been further undermined by the emergence of much improved techniques of reconstruction that allow only experts to see the difference.'
18 B. Mulder, 'Het reconstrueren van gebouwd erfgoed', in: Stroux et al. 2011 (note 2), 46-51, 48; W. de Jonge, 'Oorspronkelijkheid versus reconstructie – waar ligt de grens? Een verkenning in de restauratiepraktijk van monumenten', in: Stroux et al. 2011 (note 2), 12-19.
19 D. MacCannell, 'Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings', *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1973) 3, 589-603.
20 *Die Dresdner Frauenkirche. Geschichte ihres Wiederaufbaus, uitgegeven als Dresdner Hefte* 20 (2002), no. 71.
21 See also Stroux 2015 (note 1).
22 Denslagen 2010 (note 11).

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Reconstructions of vanished buildings are new creations, lacking unity of time, place and function. Because of this, arguments based on the theoretical principles of heritage preservation – which advocate the preservation of age- and evidence-related values and of historical building substance – are rarely pertinent. Nevertheless, reconstructions are not without danger, given that they relativize the value of historical materiality, leading to the 'dissolution of the real monument' (Glendinning 2013).

The evaluation of material remnants of the past was destabilized by the Nara Conference on Authenticity in 1994. According to the Nara Document on Authenticity, the notion of authenticity should be evaluated from the perspective of the cultural context to which it belongs. Within that context a heritage object can be judged authentic based on credible historical sources and material, but also based on sources that attest to authentic aspects like function, design, tradition and spiritual or social value.

This conceptualization of authenticity serves to sideline material authenticity. The dominance of conceptual approaches has a negative impact on the way material heritage is dealt with. The devaluing of scientific, material sources places material heritage in a narrative context, thereby rendering it vulnerable to ideological framing.