



AUTHENTICITY OF HISTORIC MONUMENTS. (FROM A "DIGNIFIED MUMMY" TO A "POST-MONUMENT")

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ABSTRACT: The paper presents the author's voice in the discussion on the authenticity of architectural monuments. It refers to the concept of authenticity, the problem of its relativization, tests the WHL "authenticity test", and proposes the concept of "post-monument" as an equivalent of "post-truth".

KEY WORDS: authenticity, architectural monument, post-truth

Authenticity - definition

In English *authenticity* is defined as „*the quality of being real or true*”¹. It is similar in Polish.

Authenticity in the Nara Document²

The problem of the authenticity of a monument which is a subject of the Nara Document concerns primarily objects eligible for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Although the term *authenticity* itself appears in various places in the text, the message of the Document is perhaps most clearly expressed in points 10 and 11³. However, the document avoids defining the concept of *authenticity*, referring only to the possibility of recognizing it through an “authenticity test” based on information sources⁴, i.e. “*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 them and “*material, written, oral and figurative sources*” permits elaboration of the “*specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined*”. The idea of the “authenticity test” mentioned in the document originated in the USA in the mid-1950s, but the original term “integrity” was later replaced by the term “authenticity”⁵ by the World Heritage Committee, although these concepts are obviously not identical.

The multifaceted perception of the concept and problem of authenticity has led to their inevitable relativization: “*The essence of the notion of authenticity would thus reinforce the Nara Conference conclusion that the notion is culturally relative*”⁶.

There is no sense in arguing with this statement, because it is true and results directly from the cultural diversity of the world; regardless of the currently fashionable or dominant tendencies, usually strongly ideologically or politically tinged, including those aimed at its homogenization or globalization – or the opposite. This is proven by the Yamato Declaration, which states, among other things:

¹ Cambridge Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>. See also: Oxford English Dictionary: “With reference to a document, artefact, artwork, etc.: the fact or quality of being authentic”; Oxford English Dictionary. <https://www.oed.com>. (retrieved: 22.01.2025).

² *The Nara document on authenticity*, (1994). <https://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/386-the-nara-document-on-authenticity-1994> (retrieved 22.01.2025).

³ *Ibidem*, 10. “Authenticity, (...) appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values. The understanding of authenticity plays a fundamental role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration planning (...).11. All judgements about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. (...)”.

⁴ *Ibidem*, (p. 13) and Appendix II.

⁵ Stovel, H. (2020). *Origins and influence of the Nara document on authenticity. Conversaciones... con Herb Stovel*, 8, p. 18. <https://www.icrom.org/es/publication/conversaciones-con-herb-stovel-number-8-2020> (retrieved 22.01.2025).

⁶ i.e. Munjeri, D. (2001). *The notions of integrity and authenticity: the emerging patterns in Africa. Expert meeting*. (Ed.) G. Saouma-Forero, Great Zimbabwe, 26/29 May, 2000, UNESCO, Paris, p. 18.

"8. further considering that intangible cultural heritage is constantly recreated, the term "authenticity" as applied to tangible cultural heritage is not relevant when identifying and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage".

This also means, however, that there is no reason or sense in adopting views on this subject developed in other cultural circles as one's own. They have their own long traditions and motivations, and regardless of the respect they deserve, our attention should be focused on the field of our own cultural heritage.

Relativism, but still...

The relativization of authenticity is in some sense analogous to – and perhaps even a consequence of – the relativism of artistic value ascertained by Riegl at the beginning of the 20th century: „Nach heutigen Begriffen gibt es sonach keinen absoluten, sondern bloß einen relativen, modernen Kunstwert“⁸.

In the Western culture, the importance of the authenticity of the form of monuments – although probably for different reasons – was noticed already at the turn of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as evidenced by the criticism of the reconstruction of Santo Stefano Rotondo al Celio at that time⁹. Understanding its significance, which essentially gives meaning to conservation activities, led to the resolutions of the Venice Charter.

And although the Charter does not define the concept of authenticity saying only about "handing the historic monuments on" to "the future generations" in "the full richness of their authenticity" (Preamble) and that the restoration must be based on respect for original material and authentic documents (Article 9), the meaning of its message is clear. Just like the Nara Document - although they are not equivalent for instruction on how to assemble the Ikea furniture.

⁷ The Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage (Annex I), In: *The International Conference on "The Safeguarding of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards an Integrated Approach"* (Nara, Japan, 19-23 October 2004). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137634> (retrieved: 25.01.2025).

⁸ Riegl, A. (1903). *Der moderne Denkmalkultus sein Wesen und seine Entstehung*. Wien: K.K. Zentral-Kommision für Kunst – und historische Denkmale (p. 5). <https://diglib.tugraz.at/der-moderne-denkmalkultus-1903> (retrieved 22.01.2025).

⁹ Jokilehto, J. (2008), *A History of Architectural Conservation*. Amsterdam: Elsevier (p. 31). See also: Zsolt Szakács, B. (2012). *Santo Stefano Rotondo through the Glasses of the Renaissance – and without Them, Art History – the Future in Now. Studies in Honour of Professor Vladimir P. Goss*. (Ed.) M. Cepetić et al., Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (pp. 216-256).

Despite this, in the times of "negotiatory...", "genial..." or "demagogic conservation"¹⁰, the efforts to define and search for ultimately undefined authenticity have become something like a search for the Philosopher's Stone of conservation of monuments. In mass-produced texts, they take a form similar to St. Thomas Aquinas' reflections on the presence of angels, leading to the creation of bizarre notions such as "authentic reconstruction"¹¹, "historical reconstruction"¹² - as an antithesis to "in-authentic reconstruction"¹³, "new-authenticities"¹⁴ etc.

This kind of balancing act, aimed at proving authenticity, could be understood in terms of the fight for the inclusion of various sites on the World Heritage List, when the prestige of individual countries and the expected serious interests involved are at stake.

(The example of Gdańsk illustrates this well; its authenticity, both in terms of its historical substance and its intangible heritage, has been preserved only in vestigial form.)

Although for the purposes of entry on the List, authenticity is not perceived as intrinsic value, nor as the sole criterion for evaluation... However, it is probably still a fundamental value in the Western culture, despite the vagueness of this concept. At least in relation to historic buildings (or complexes) that are the subject of this text.

It is beyond dispute that - if the field of protection and conservation is to be taken seriously - the assessment of the authenticity of "ordinary" monuments should be based on solid foundations and as free as possible from ideological or political influences.

Authenticity vs. realism

Therefore, remaining with "ordinary" historic buildings (as well as complexes or their archaeological relics), which constitute proper cultural heritage resources, and are not the subject of political ambitions or specific intentions, apart from the intention of their preservation, it would be interesting to test the "authenticity test" itself, in accordance with the model included in the UNESCO Operational Guidelines (Chapter II.E.82)¹⁵.

This will allow us to randomly check the real usefulness of this model for the assessment of monuments and answer the question whether fully authentic monuments exist at all.

¹⁰ Muñoz-Viñas, S. (2005). *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*. Amsterdam: Elsevier (p. 205).

¹¹ Bold, J., Larkham, P., Pickard R. (Eds.). (2018). *Authentic Reconstruction. Authenticity, Architecture and the Built Heritage*. London-New York: Bloomsbury.

¹² Riga Charter on authenticity and historical reconstruction in relationship to cultural heritage. (2000); *Conversaciones... con Herb Stovel*, 8 (pp. 258-259).

¹³ Stovel, H. (2020). *Origins and influence of the Nara document on authenticity. Conversaciones... con Herb Stovel*, 8, p. 24. <https://www.iccrom.org/es/publication/conversaciones-con-herb-stovel-number-8-2020> (retrived 22.01.2025).

¹⁴ Glendinning, M. (2013). *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation. Antiquity to Modrnty*. London: Routledge (p. 446).

¹⁵ *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention UNESCO World Heritage Centre*. (2024). <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines> (dostęp 22.01.2025). (pp.79-86).

The listed characteristics of authenticity are:

- a) form and design;
- b) materials and substance;
- c) use and function;
- d) traditions, techniques and management systems;
- e) language, and other forms of intangible heritage;
- f) location and setting;
- g) spirit and feeling (additional factors);
- h) other internal and external factors.

Chapter II.E.86. also addresses the issue of authenticity in the reconstruction of archaeological remains, historic buildings or districts, considering them to be exceptionally justified, and the reconstructions themselves to be acceptable "only on the basis of complete and detailed documentation and to no extent on conjecture".

For the purposes of the test, points marked d), e), g) and h) could be omitted, as they are only indirectly related to the matter of architectural monuments and are subject to rather subjective assessments.

Building traditions do not have to be related to historic buildings, i.e. those from the past, because traditional techniques are used to construct contemporary buildings that are not related to history (e.g. half-timbered houses) and management systems do not belong directly to the sphere of architecture.

Form and design (a)

The basic problem here is to determine what form of a historic building is considered authentic. Should it be the original form, i.e. consistent with the design, or the form the object obtained immediately after construction, or something else? The original form – assigned to a specific era – in many or even most cases remains unknown or simply did not exist because the construction process sometimes stretched over centuries with long breaks. This was the case, for example, with large churches (e.g. cathedrals in Cologne or Cracow) or buildings whose construction, in line with the original intention, was not completed for various reasons (e.g. Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma), or or they were changed during construction (e.g. complexes of modern fortifications). Most buildings (e.g. public buildings, residences or town houses) changed their forms and historical costumes naturally, through alterations and extensions; apart from the need for rebuilding. Not only their form changed, but also their structure, adapted to changing functional needs, and the design, however understood, were subject to change. Most of such preserved and "living" objects (using the old, logical classification of Giovannoni) have undergone constant transformations up to the present day - including as a result of restoration activities. And they will probably be transformed further, like the Louvre, whose expansion in the coming years

was recently officially announced¹⁶. In this context, the possible artistic value of the additions is irrelevant; a banal, Gothic annex is usually more valuable as a monument than an annex from the beginning of the 20th century, but the latter is no less authentic... Can one therefore deny the authenticity of the rebuilt New Museum in Berlin? If so, only the churches of Lalibela and the indestructible Barabar caves should be considered authentic monuments.

Materials and substance (b) may have changed over time along with structural changes

Of course, the core of the structure, such as the foundations or main walls, could remain unchanged in terms of material – “original”, fully authentic, constituting the skeleton of the architectural form. However, the situation with partition walls and coverings (vaults, ceilings, roofs) was different. As a result of changes in architectural style or due to simple functional or technical needs, changes occurred in the form of layering or replacement of materials forming the surface (cladding, plasters, coatings, roof coverings). And in this respect the “state of authenticity” of the monument changed. In addition, there were the effects of restoration, as was the case with the devastated Villa Savoye in Poissy.

Restorations usually lead to inauthentic situations, although often beneficial for scientific reasons. This was the case, for example, with the Camposanto Monumentale in Pisa, which was rebuilt after the destruction of war. The partially damaged frescoes removed for restoration were returned to their original locations, but the sketches (*sinopia*) underneath them, after being removed from the walls and conserved, were placed for exhibition in a separate building.

In the case of buildings constructed from less durable materials, their replacement has always been a necessity. It concerned primarily surface coverings (boarding, plaster, shingles, thatch), but also structural elements (foundations, wall elements) that constitute the substance of the monument.

Some types of structures, for example such as the monumental North African “ksars”, whose walls were built as clay monoliths, must be supplemented with new surface layers as part of normal, technically understood conservation.

In some types of buildings, all the material was replaced gradually or suddenly, and it was not about ritual reasons, as in the case of the Ise Shrine, which was the direct reason for the creation of the Nara Document. Examples include floating islands of Lake Titicaca, made of cane or even Inuit igloos, also a type of architecture.

However, it is difficult to describe these objects as inauthentic, despite certain changes in their use. Their authenticity is also closer to the attribute relating to tradition and technology.

¹⁶ *Le Monde*, 28.01.2025. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2025/01/28/macron-lays-out-ambitious-renovation-plan-for-louvre-museum_6737526_7.html (retrieved 30.01.2025).

Use and function (c)

Changes in this respect were and are natural, and they were probably the most important reason for changes in the material structure of monuments, as a response to changing human needs, even in the case of maintaining a living, dominant function (e.g. dwelling houses).

Location and setting (f)

Buildings and structures generally do not change location (except in exceptional transfer situations). However, their spatial context and surroundings usually undergo some changes, and in the case of objects with a long history, this even happens repeatedly.

The cause is the action of natural factors, such as changes in the coastline (e.g. Milet, Pisa); volcanic activity (e.g. Herculaneum) or human activity as transformations of urban structure (e.g. the construction of Via della Conciliazione connecting Saint Peter's Square to the Castel Sant'Angelo or the surrounding of Notre Dame, "cleared" of historic buildings during the 19th-century restoration).

On the other hand, even transfers do not always have to result in a complete loss of authenticity in this respect. Situated in a completely artificial context, the temples of Abu Simbel seem to retain the full material authenticity of their substance. The Philae temple complex, while maintaining the authenticity of the substance, was also set in an almost natural scenery; at least in respect of "spirit and feeling".

"Dignified mummies" and "living monuments"

Even such a cursory and incomplete review of the attributes of authenticity proposed by the "Operational Guidelines" leads to the conclusion that architectural monuments only rarely retain their full authenticity.

Assuming that the basis for the authenticity of a building/structure is the authentic (original, primary) building material that has been given an architectural form, the ideal model of the monument would be a "dignified mummy" or an object that has remained materially unchanged since its inception and set in an unchanged context. A good example would be preserved in the desert sands, still untouched by archaeologists, the tombs of Saqqara; (although here one could expect traces of the activities of ancient robbers...)

It is not difficult to notice that the authentic state of the vast majority of "living" monuments, constantly functioning and undergoing transformations, although to a very varying degree, is a more or less significant lack of material authenticity.

It results from the loss or the need to transform or replace the original/primary substance, destroyed or worn out to an extent that prevents its further existence or the object from fulfilling its function.

It is worth noting that a contemporary element consolidating the structure of a building does not automatically become a historic element, just as a prosthetic limb does not become a part of the body. The more such elements there are, the less authentic the monument itself becomes.

(Of course, the addition can also become a monument, but this requires – in accordance with the generally understood concept of a monument in the Western culture – time; examples include 19th-century replicas of medieval sculptures from Lichfield Cathedral). However, such a progressive, natural process cannot be denied authenticity.

The range of preservation/loss of authenticity is enormous. At one extreme are objects that are somewhat naturally decomposed historically and, due to factors such as the solidity of their structure and building materials, a favorable climate (and sometimes financial constraints), are subject to relatively minor conservation interventions. The examples include on the one hand well preserved Forte Belvedere at Florence and the High Castle in Marienburg, reconstructed in the 19th c., and rebuilt after war damages in 1945.

In terms of assessing the form and matter (substance), the only question that arises is the problematic criterion of age – which determines the limit of its authenticity. Its rejection would require recognizing all architectural additions, including contemporary ones and perhaps even those still being planned, not only as authentic but also as being on a par with historic elements. This is especially true since the assessment of their value is usually subjective. Perhaps we should not therefore speak of authenticity as such – because everything that exists is authentic as such – but of "historical authenticity"?

Highly authentic monuments are historical ruins, i.e. objects that have been in ruins for a long (- how long?) time. Paradoxically, in this case the loss of material authenticity occurs not as a result of subtraction, but of the addition of contemporary material in an amount exceeding that necessary for the technical action deforming historically preserved form of the object. An example is the ever-growing Parthenon, originally built from "building blocks" that can be easily replicated, based on preserved authentic elements.

The need for authenticity (?) – post-monument

„Die Welt will ja betrogen sein,

Drum werde sie betrogen”!

CH. F. Weiße (1726-1804)

The blurring of the concept and criteria of authenticity, observed over the past few decades and attributed to the Nara Document, as a result of its incomprehension (or rather its use as a convenient cover for various activities that have little in common with the conservation of monuments), has led to the appearance in the cultural landscape of objects that can be called "post-monuments".

These would be equivalents of the term *post-truth*¹⁷ coined in recent years.

Paraphrasing dictionary definitions, post-truth is not constituted by objectively existing facts, but rather what people — driven by emotions and beliefs — are inclined to accept as facts. In other words, it can be a widely accepted falsehood.

A post-monument of architecture can be defined similarly - as an object built in modern times, intended however to serve as a real historic monument; sometimes imitating the form of a historic monument that has ceased to exist, reproduced on the basis of more or less credible premises, or simply having a "historical form" that has never existed in history. It would therefore be a surrogate for a monument, but socially it would often be perceived as a historic monument - due to the unawareness or will of the recipients.

The concept of a post-monument should be included in the sphere of mass culture, while the terms – *reconstruction*, *restoration*, *rebuilding*¹⁸ – might be included among the names of technical activities.

One might therefore ask what is the sense – apart from pure sarcasm – of creating such a concept. But – it is the same as in the case of post-truth, which often means untruth...

The term *pseudo-monument*, sometimes used (at least in Polish), should rather be reserved for structures which - although they may appear to be historic monuments - were not intended to be

¹⁷ Cambridge Dictionary defines the term post-truth as: "relating to a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than one based on facts". Cambridge Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/post-truth>, (retrieved 22.01.2025). English Oxford Living Dictionary defines it quite similar: "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief"; see: Oxford English Dictionary. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth> (retrieved 22.01.2025).

¹⁸ In Polish: „rekonstrukcja”, „restauracja” „odbudowa”; similar terminological differences exist in English: e.g. „facsimile reconstruction”, „facsimile rebuilding”, „reproduction”, „reconstruction”, and even „facsimile urbanism”. See: Glendinning, M. (2013). *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation. Antiquity to Modernity*. London: Routledge (p. 435); Feilden, B. M. (2003). *Conservation of Historic Buildings*. Amsterdam: Elsevier (pp. 11-12).

considered as such; they were simply built in a "historical" style due to one or another motivation of the investor. Such buildings were and are products of authentic architectural historicism, both historical and contemporary.

Examples of such contemporary structures include either the Château de Guédelon¹⁹, built as an archeological experiment or neo-modernist buildings, designed in a more or less literal style of modernism from approximately 1920-1960s.

The way to create post-monuments was opened in the Western world by the dramas of two world wars, under a kind of "pragmatic sanction", understandable and motivated by social emotions, even though it was in contradiction with the contemporary theory of conservation developed at the same time, which emphasized the need to preserve material authenticity and limit potentially falsifying activities. The effect of this was and is the absolutely justified reconstruction of destroyed objects of special value (e.g. Ypres Cloth Hall or Fruenkirche in Dresden).

In Poland, however (and from the author's point of view this aspect is the most important) the consequence of this justification has become the abuse of such actions. Moreover, over the last few decades, the centre of gravity of this activity in Poland seems to have been shifted from the mainly scientific conservation sphere (although never free from the influence of cultural policy – local or national) to the sphere of mass culture, in which cultural heritage is treated like any other product of the entertainment industry, i.e. in fact an object of commercial exchange.

It can be assumed that in Poland the attractiveness of post-monuments for a wide audience is primarily due to the relatively small number of authentic monuments of high value; (except churches, but these are perceived as a sphere of the sacred, not of entertainment). Their quantity and quality cannot satisfy the social need to participate in a historicizing utopia, perfectly created by computers, now with the help of AI.

This stems from the consumer's level of expertise, who lacks the need or ability to distinguish between a post-monument and a monument. Just as to distinguish between post-truth and truth... However bitter this reflection may be, post-monuments are, unlike post-truth, a hard – "authentic" fact, the existence of which will not be ended by the appearance of a new post-truth in the global network.

The impact of post-monuments on the cultural landscape is as varied as the motives and material effects of their creation.

A positive impact can be seen in well-done reconstructions aimed at reintegrating the cultural landscape, restoring the spirit of the place or recovering the shape of valuable buildings destroyed as a result of wars or natural disasters. There are many examples in Europe, such as: the Royal Castle in Warsaw or the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow.

¹⁹ *Guédelon*. <https://www.guedelon.fr> (retrieved 30.01.2025).

Most of the objects are probably quite indifferent elements of the landscape, contributing to the "background architecture". In terms of quality, however, they seem to be better than the somewhat stale results of postmodern experiments. The apparent lack of historical authenticity, as evidenced by patina, natural blemishes and material losses, should not be perceived as a flaw; even on the contrary, as a sign of their contemporary origins.

These are primarily buildings or complexes that are easily aesthetically acceptable to the general public, such as the *Kommendantenhaus* in Berlin, the facades of the Main Town complexes in Gdańsk or Frankfurt am Main, where more or less carefully recreated facades accompany contemporary ones, creating uniform architectural complexes.

Sometimes post-monuments surprise with their peculiar authenticity, such as the *Neues Schleiermacherhaus* in Berlin, built in the Baroque style but made of wood-based materials... However, the impact of some post-monuments is definitely negative. They distort the cultural landscape, and their creation is accompanied by the destruction of monuments or their remains.

In some cases, the term "devastating" best illustrates the impact of such objects on the cultural environment. Perhaps the most striking Polish example is the so-called "Royal Castle" in Poznań, built at the beginning of the 21st century.

Buildings of this kind cannot be taken seriously either as monuments, which they are not, or as works of architecture; they are unintentional caricatures of historical style, constituting a evidence of the level of culture of investors, designers and architectural education of society. However, if they survive, they will acquire historical authenticity over time, becoming documents of the era in which they were created...

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