

# Commentary

## Notes on the Work of Heritage in the Age of Archaeological Reproduction

QUETZIL E. CASTAÑEDA

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

Benjamin 1968a: 257–58

From where and when did the proliferation of discourses, policies, investigations, protocols, practices, programs, degree plans, and foundations of and for heritage begin? Twenty years ago, few thought about heritage but instead were hotly debating identity politics, multiculturalism, and the survival of cultures in advanced late capitalism and in nationalist modernities. The decade from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s was the final battle in the great (and global) culture wars over cultural diversity and rights. Ironically, even though culture won—that is, “culture” and “cultures” were finally accepted as really real reality that could not be uprooted by modernization schemes and political solutions to the problem of the Other—Culture itself, that is, culture as a concept and theory, died (valiantly, no doubt). On this battlefield, Heritage itself was erected—pardon my poesis—as the monument to this war and the ongoing wreckage of culture. An Angel of Heritage must have witnessed this catastrophe and, wishing to restore a lost holism, only managed to convert all the fragments and debris of culture into the detritus of heritage, which continues to pile on high. This, in short, is the origin story of the current proliferation of kinds, types, forms, modes, concepts, conflicts, politics, strategies, and analyses of “heritage” in

the globalized world today, as well as in this book that you, dear reader, have in your hands.

In light of this image, consider the differences between Laurajane Smith, Christopher Matthews and Matthew Palus, and O. Hugo Benavides in the following chapters. Smith argues that heritage is a mode of governmentality, that is, a strategy of control and management of “heritage.”<sup>1</sup> This implies, even presupposes, that archaeology is deeply interconnected with heritage, even though the force of Smith’s argument is to analyze the conflicted tensions between the past constructed as an archaeologically managed heritage and the past pre-given as a heritage whose authentic meaning is constituted by indigenous values. Benavides is not at all concerned with the management of material heritage; instead, he focuses on discourses, symbolic value, knowledge, and meanings of heritage, which archaeology, archaeologists, the state, and indigenous groups struggle to shape and control. Although these two chapters present overtly different conceptualizations of heritage to analyze quite distinct socio-ethnographic situations, their shared perspective and commonality in approach are revealed when contrasted to the chapter by Matthews and Palus. The latter assert that archaeology and heritage are antagonistically opposed and disjunctive. Underlying this proposition is the idea that heritage is like culture and is a manifestation or expression of a “culture” of a social group.

Heritage, for Matthews and Palus, is, therefore, not at all a strategy but a real, material, and meaningful bundle of things that constitute at least part of “the past” of a cultural community. This is not to say that there is not a theory embedded within this latter mode of heritage; in this view, heritage is not a strategy but the goals, objects, objectives, and means of strategies that have a rightful relation of use and ownership over their past. Furthermore, any and all social groups must have, do have, and have a right to have *their* heritage so as to maintain the integrity of *their* culture and identity. Heritage references discernible cultures (cultural communities in the plural). In short, these authors present three visions of heritage: heritage as a management toolkit of social sciences (Smith), heritage as a field of contested interpretations (Benavides), and heritage as a practical materiality lived and experienced on the ground (Matthews and Palus). By clarifying the points of difference and overlap between these three views, I chart my own conceptualization of heritage.

If we position ourselves alongside Walter Benjamin, who envisions history through the figure of the Angel of History (see chapter epigraph), we can begin to deepen our understanding of why *heritage* has so often replaced *culture* as the term of reference in archaeological discourse, public debate, policy formation, and international intergovernmental discussions. Benjamin construes history as a continuous catastrophe that keeps on accumulating wreckage, which the Angel of History looks upon as he relentlessly moves into the future while facing backwards toward

the ever-growing pile of debris, that is, the “past.” In this analogy, Benjamin’s catastrophe points to the continuous critique of the holism of culture, the irrefutable demise of essentialism, the endless hybridization of identity, the proliferation of split and divided subjectivities, and the defrocking of multiculturalism as strategies of control and consumer diversification that began in the late 1970s. What remains are fragments and shards of cultural wholes that have no unassailable transcendent or even immanent logic of reintegration. To return to my question posed above, why the erasure of holism in this turn from culture to heritage? The answer is identified in the language of the last sentence of UNESCO’s definition of “intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003: Article 2 “definitions” [#1–2]; see also UNESCO 1972: Article 1, “definitions”): heritage, via the “compatible existing international human rights instruments,” functions to manage and govern (that is, “legislates”) identity, especially in the context of “the requirements of mutual respect . . . and sustainable development.”<sup>2</sup>

The application of Benjamin’s allegory of history to archaeology provides additional insights. If we substitute the holism, unity, essentialism, and so on of culture for the historical “chain of events,” then a curious understanding is revealed: we might very well recognize that we ourselves seek to be “the angel [of Heritage who] would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (Benjamin 1968a: 258). When I say “we,” I refer to all of us who participate in the activity of heritage management, dispute, litigation, claims, interpretation, protection—that is, all of us archaeologists, aborigines, UNESCO heritage administrators, cultural resource managers, anthropologists, indigenous groups, citizens of Eastport, international lawyers, and heritage NGOs—who would like to recuperate the “past” as heritage for an identifiable cultural community as a means that might reestablish the integrity, propriety, and proper ownership (if not also the integrative unity) of culture, community, identity, and belonging via the concept and diverse practices of heritage. Certainly, the archaeological impulse to investigate, know, and restore the historical pasts of humanity in general and of specific societies in particular is evidence enough of this nostalgic desire to make the present moment “whole” by reunifying it with a resuscitated past.<sup>3</sup> In turn, all the various disaggregating techniques that seek to document, classify, quantify, and otherwise isolate artifacts and data (that is, the archaeological record) are, ultimately, always subordinated to the larger project of constituting and constructing wholes out of diverse fragments and by mobilizing these into coherent series, such as styles, horizons, sites, and typologies, and these into encompassing hierarchies of series, such as regions, city-states, societies, civilizations, human civilization, and humanity.

Matthews and Palus (chapter 6) explicitly acknowledge this motivation and ideal in their vision and use of heritage as the material expressions of identity that properly

belong to each unique cultural group versus to a universalized humanity. Thus, as already noted, they oppose heritage and archaeology, the latter of which, they are correct to point out, emerges as a Western discipline that tends to transform the particular pasts of distinct groups into the legacy of a generalized human civilization. When archaeology is so able to universalize heritage—that is, reconstitute it as part and parcel of a unitary modernity belonging to everyone—then its “authentic” nature as the property of particular cultures and social groups is radically diminished, if not entirely denied. This oppositional logic, which makes “heritage” and “archaeology” antinomies, is also evident in Smith’s theorization of heritage as governmentality, à la Michel Foucault (chapter 5). Although archaeology and heritage are conceptualized as interlinked processes via governmentality, Smith’s application of governmentality presupposes the existence of a heritage-past that lies outside of the hegemony of strategic resource management and is in some sense authentic, aboriginal, and untainted by Western science (Smith, this volume; see also Smith 2004).

To point out this contradiction is not to critique Smith’s premise so much as to identify this duplicity in heritage as irreducible. Heritage in a loose, nontheoretical, nonanalytical sense is indeed the property of a cultural community as its (rightfully or wrongfully) inherited past. Yet heritage is a strategy of power in the hands of archaeology as a tool of state control and technology of governance of cultural minorities through the shaping of identity-belonging. Thus, along the lines of Smith’s argument, which is also based on Foucault’s theory of governmentality, I suggest the need to conceptualize a theory of heritage in relation to power. By coining the term *heritage-power*, along the lines of the French philosopher’s well-known notion of bio-power (Foucault 1980), we can begin to think about and investigate heritage in new ways such that we make use of it instead of its simply using us. Despite the Foucaultian basis of Smith’s theorizing heritage, there is a lingering leftist-Marxian or Weberian assumption of domination whereby power (more precisely, heritage as a strategy of power, that is, governmentality) is wielded exclusively by the dominant; in this and other intellectual traditions, subordinate groups are categorically and theoretically excluded from having, possessing, and even using power, since it is the very absence of power that subordinates the dominated group and gives them their identity as subordinate! Foucault’s notion of power, and thus also his theory of governmentality, however, eschews the conceptualization of power as, first, something that can be possessed and, second, something that works only (by definition) in a top-down fashion (Foucault 1980, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Gordon 1991; Hindess 1996; Rose 1996).

It is this significant caveat to the analysis of heritage as a mode of governmentality that Benavides offers. In his chapter, Benavides implicitly argues that the management of heritage discourses of identity is not simply a weapon of “the strong” that is only and always possessed and wielded by the state, science, or other hegemonic

institutions. Heritage, as a strategy of power by which to manage the past and to generate narratives of identity, is available for diverse social agents to exercise. Thus, in the Ecuadorian case that Benavides analyzes in chapter 7, archaeological heritage is a resource and strategy for producing discourses of identity by agents invested in the national project and by those involved in the indigenous movement. Certainly, there is differential access to the use and effectiveness of the exercise of this heritage-power. But just as indubitably, heritage is available as a strategy for those who accede—willingly or with friction and resistance—to the conditions and dynamics of its deployment.

Here, and in line with Foucault's notions of strategy and power, specifically bio-power (Foucault 1980), I refer to the necessary transformations in the subject positioning and mode of subjectivity of those who enter the field of contestation in which heritage is generated, managed, and disputed. This effectiveness in shifting aspects of subjectivity is what Smith points to as a significant dimension of heritage as governmentality. This logic also underlies the brief, negative reference that Matthews and Palus make regarding how archaeology, via certain kinds of outreach and engagement with publics, implicitly seeks to convert stakeholders into archaeologists or archaeological subjects—that is, subjects with the proper responsibilities, obligations, viewpoints, attitudes, identities, and habits for the assumption of ownership and management of archaeological heritage. Several recent studies (including Castañeda 2005; Castañeda and Castillo Cocom 2002; Castillo Cocom 2002; Breglia 2006) discuss this dimension of the work of heritage in producing the proper subjects of archaeology to inherit the stewardship of archaeologically produced heritage. Similarly, Benavides in his chapter details a case in which members of the indigenous movement of Ecuador have already entered into the field of power to assert themselves as proper managers and interpreters of the meaning and messages of heritage. In that case, however, the indigenous groups enter the field of contestation as “undomesticated,” improper subjects (from the view of science) because the meanings they assert do not comply with the Ecuadorian establishment archaeology.

In focusing on these conflicts of interpretation of heritage, Benavides' chapter stands in contrast to the chapters by Smith and by Matthews and Palus. Whereas Smith attends to the issues of the management of heritage materials or “resources” (as cultural resource management, or CRM), Matthews and Palus focus on the field-work negotiation with stakeholders by archaeologists. These authors not only conceive of heritage differently but also, as one might suspect, problematize heritage as an object of study in three distinct ways. These points of difference return us to multiple expressions, forms, and modes of heritage and to the question of how to make sense of this diversity.

To my mind, it is necessary to situate (archaeological, cultural, tangible) heritage

in history as a phenomenon that is not at all independent of archaeology but instead exists in strict and intimate relationship to it. Indeed, the work of heritage only begins to become what we now understand it to be in what I would call the “age of archaeological reproduction.” This phrase borrows from Benjamin’s (1968b) famous analysis of the work of art: he argues that the modern era’s technological capacity to create identical or mimetic copies has a transformative effect on the aura of art, or what can be glossed as its attribute of uniqueness and authenticity. In adapting Benjamin’s notion to heritage, I first point out that the technologies of archaeological reproduction are not restricted to the discipline and science of archaeology; rather, archaeological reproduction consists of an inclusive panoply of methods and techniques of preservation, conservation, protection, and restoration that are applied within a variety of practical fields—ecology, history, environmentalism, architecture, even tourism—to re-create an origin/original (that is, an *archaē*) or its image. Many have cited Benjamin’s quotable phrase that “aura withers away” as a result of technological capacity for mimetic reproduction. However, many studies have demonstrated that this is not actually or empirically the case; aura, authenticity, and the value of uniqueness thrive in modernity. Furthermore, in a less quoted section of his analysis, Benjamin argues not that aura “disappears” but rather that the basis of aura shifts from the holism of “tradition” and ritual to what he calls “politics.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, I suggest that the basis and nature of heritage in the age of archaeological reproduction have been undergoing a profound transformation in the conditions of possibility underlying heritage, that is, from relatively unproblematized “inheritance” based in relations of identity to tradition, to politicized construction of identity and cultural ownership in contexts of advanced, globalized capitalism.

As an ethnographer of archaeology—that is, as one who investigates archaeology ethnographically, using ethnography—I am fascinated by the way archaeology creates reality. Of particular significance is the key difference between the archaeological reproduction of the past and what Benjamin analyzed as the mimetic copying of modern technologies such as photography. Put simply, archaeology invents (that is, literally constructs) complex representations of the past that are not mimetic but simply appear—and not always to everyone, of course—as if they were faithfully identical copies and transparent mimetic representations of a past that, however, actually never did exist as such in the manner constructed for tourists today. As I have argued elsewhere (Castañeda 1996), all archaeological constructions are forms of hyper-reality (Eco 1990) and simulacra (Baudrillard 1995).<sup>5</sup>

Consider one of the primary truisms taught in introductory archaeology classes: archaeology destroys the past in its process of investigation; that is, the possibility of retrieving information and even the materiality of the past is destroyed through specific methodologies of knowledge production. We may note, therefore, that this

is one among several reasons why, even in cases where there is restoration, the resulting ruins—which often take form as life-size, scale-model “replicas” of cities or settlements—are never identical to any actual past. That archaeology destroys the past, even as it salvages specific elements of that totality to create a material and partial representation of that past, requires an unquestioned epistemological trick on which to ground the scientific agenda of archaeology. The concept of the “archaeological record” is precisely this epistemological anchorage that allows for the production and accumulation of knowledge based on the destruction of the knowable material of the past. The archaeological record comprises not just the raw, material, disjunctive, and fragmentary remains of the past but also the full gamut of field notes, drawings, photographs, measurements, descriptions, analyses, and recordings created by archaeologists as the documentation of data (also see Patrick 1985).

Without in any way suggesting a philosophical opposition between mind and matter, I do assert that it would be analytically useful to recognize, investigate, and engage the following three forms or registers “of heritage”: the material fragments of the past, the archaeological inscription of this materiality as data, and the interpretation of the archaeological past. Even in cases where there is overlap among and intersection of these three forms, each presents distinct fields of power, contestation, knowledge, and practice. Differences among the three chapters of this section illustrate this point. Each of these chapters, I suggest, can be viewed as having analyzed the field of political contestation that is defined and organized by the problems posed by one of these forms of heritage. Smith’s analysis of the management of cultural resources as governmentality is situated in the problem of the control of the materiality of the archaeological record—that is, that part of the record that consists of the disjunctive series of object-fragments of the past. Her analysis of how CRM as governmentality impinges on indigenous rights and ownership of heritage in this first register definitely points toward, but is not about, the conflicts of interpretation and meaning of archaeological heritage. Matthews and Palus’s discussion of the fieldwork negotiation between archaeologists and stakeholders is centrally focused on the struggle to define the status and constitution of archaeological data out of the fragmentary materiality of the past (or what are called “resources” by Smith). Similarly, this focus on the constitution of archaeological data (the second form of heritage) implicates but really does not address the conflicts in the other two registers of heritage. In turn, Benavides’s attention to the competing narratives and discourses by which the past is interpreted as meaningful directly targets the problem of heritage as the politics of knowledge (production). At stake for Benavides are the politics and problem of the interpretation and meaning of archaeological heritage, not the conflicts over the archaeological record—that is, heritage in either form or register of material resources or data production.

Each of these focal points and their attendant analyses emerge from the empirical situation. In other words, the analyses are not imposed from above by the dictates of some (high) theory. Instead, the analyses focus on what the authors view as the significant issues and debates within the context in which they are working. Each gives priority to one of the three specific forms or registers of heritage (material resources, scientific data, interpretation of the past) that I have identified. From these three registers of heritage, we have three different logics of or strategies for analysis. To put it simply, the conflicts over any one of these three registers may not have any connection to conflicts in either of the other two domains. The logic and agenda of analyses must attend to this contextual particularity. The value and insights of these three chapters, including their differences, are due in fact to this kind of close inspection of the ethnographic materials.

Each of these key concepts (heritage in the form, or register, of materiality, data, and interpretation) can include types of objects but also spaces and fields of contention, practices of control and use, and politics and juridical legislation. These three forms can be further differentiated from two distinct strategies of heritage—that is, two strategies by which heritage forms are shaped into objects, means, and targets of struggle. In the first, heritage is a strategy of identity. In the second, it is a strategy of governmentality.

On the one hand, what I mean by heritage as a strategy of identity builds on what Clifford Geertz long ago called “primordial origins.” Geertz used this term to designate six types of resources for imagining nation, building national community, and forging shared belonging. In this framework, the symbols and images of the nation are constructed out of a strategic selection of the materials given by history, religion, geography, tradition, and so on. Archaeological patrimony is not one of Geertz’s types of primordial origins, yet it is interesting because it crosscuts his categories in a unique way. It is a resource and a strategy to construct and imagine “nation” (and therefore, “national modernity”) that is concretely generated, materialized, shaped, and disseminated—via the sciences of archaeology and anthropology (with ancillary help from associated sciences). In other words, whereas Geertz’s primordial origins are in some sense inherent to community as lived practices, customs, traditions, and values, the significance of (archaeological) patrimony for national identity formation is that it is constructed outside of the quotidian, experiential life of a community by expert-knowledge producers. The interpretive content of this knowledge is reformulated into narratives of and master debates about the nation as a unified, modern community of identity and belonging. I would call this strategic use of “heritage” patrimony or primordial heritage to contrast it from contemporary lay concepts of “heritage”; equally, these formulations point to distinct conflicts over how community is imagined.



On the other hand, heritage as a strategy of governmentality entails a radically different politics of heritage. In heritage governmentality, identity is not the product of primordial heritage but instead a crucial mechanism and tool crafted to control, regulate, manage, and, especially, claim rights of use and ownership over heritage as data and resource. As a rationality for managing and regulating heritage, identity is displaced as an issue of conflict. As a rationality for claiming rights and ownership of heritage, identity is a powerful weapon that is increasingly supported by a wide array of customary, national, and international legalities.

To conclude these notes, I want to point out that heritage can be used in an untheorized and generic way to reference anything that comes “from the past” and that is claimed as part of one or another group’s culture and identity. Heritage in this sense is not an analytical category, much less a concept. It is simply the dictionary definition of the word. But heritage can be theorized and conceptualized as a methodological tool that facilitates analyses of and active engagement with “heritage” issues, conflicts, debates, stakeholders, and publics. The question then becomes, what would be the parameters and elements of such an analytical and methodological tool? In forging an analytical concept of heritage, we must pay attention to the fact that not everything that appears on the surface as “heritage,” or is asserted to be such, is indeed heritage in an analytical or methodological sense. Furthermore, not all “heritage” is heritage in the same way, with the same stakes, with the same value, and with the same politics. To create a notion of heritage that is useful to social science, including archaeological research, the concept must not be used as a reified umbrella term that lumps variations and differences together indiscriminately. To be methodologically useful, a concept of heritage must distinguish types, forms, modes, and variations of heritage. Toward this end, I have sketched three forms or registers of heritage—material resource, archaeological data, and discursive knowledge—that comprise distinct, yet at times overlapping and intersecting, fields of power and contestation. It is in and through these fields of power that “heritage” is identified, defined, claimed, legislated, regulated, controlled, managed, owned, used, sold, consumed, and re-created. As well, I have suggested two strategic modes of heritage, which may or may not overlap or intersect in any given or empirical situation. On the one hand, primordial heritage, or “patrimony,” is a strategy and resource for narrating and imagining the nation. On the other hand, heritage is a mode of governmentality, that is, a strategic rationality devised to manage, regulate, and control “the past” as it is manifested as data and resource.

Heritage is many things, that is, it can refer to a wide variety of phenomena at any one time. Yet the structure outlined above may help us investigate heritage by facilitating our thinking, formulation of problems, descriptions, and analyses. Instead of working like an Angel of Heritage to reconstruct a grand theoretical whole

or singular master concept out of the debris and fragments of heritage, we should perhaps operate more like rescue workers in the ongoing wreckage of “the past” with analytical strategies that attend to the specificity of situations and issues.

## Notes

1. See Smith 2004. My thinking of heritage as governmentality was independently formulated based on my work at Chichén Itzá (Castañeda 2005, 2008).

2. The 1972 Convention on World Heritage defines cultural and natural heritage, both of which are defined as manifestations of a “universal” value. Despite this expression of universal significance, there is nonetheless no innate logical coherence, integration, or holism that constitutes world heritage. Heritage in popular discourse (as well as in UNESCO discourse) is or can be both universal/universalized and culturally particular, or only one or the other. Sometimes these two senses are in contradiction with each other and sometimes not, as in, for example, UNESCO’s universalizing conception of world heritage and its culturally particularist notion of intangible heritage found in the 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage.

3. See Benavides 2005 on the work of nostalgia in archaeology.

4. See Castañeda 2000. Note that Benjamin’s use of the term *politics* seems to obliquely refer to political economy, generally, and the politics of capitalism, specifically.

5. There are significant conceptual differences between Umberto Eco’s (1990) concept of hyperreal, Jean Baudrillard’s (1995) concept of simulacra, and Benjamin’s notion of ruin (see Castañeda 2000). On the face of it, Eco’s and Baudrillard’s ideas of hyperreal and simulacra are the “copies” to Benjamin’s idea of ruin, which is posed as the “original.” The idea of the ruin is the idea of a unique, *sui generis* time-space materiality that constitutes the origin-anchors around which are produced, endlessly, copies. “Hyperreal” is the idea of such impeccable, better-than-perfect copies not simply of a work of art but of built environments in which persons experience a reality that corresponds to the time-place that was replicated. “Simulacra” is the idea that such copies “overwhelm” and displace the original with their fabricated materiality; the copy and the experience of the copy precede any encounter with the “original”—if it ever even existed. However, the hyperreal and simulacra come to displace any original of which they are copies and thus become *sui generis*, unique ruins in themselves. This is what archaeological constructs of the past are: simulacra that have completely displaced the “real” original and substituted themselves as the ruin. The Knossos that one can visit today is perhaps the quintessential example and not unique at all to archaeology.

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# Ethnographies & Archaeologies

**Iterations of the Past**

**Edited by  
Lena Mortensen  
and Julie Hollowell**



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