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Performances within heritage contexts [SLIDE], more often than not conceived with educational intent, have been seen as troublingly and crassly fictionalising in their response to the challenges of history (see for example Hewison, 1987). They have also been seen as exemplifying an increased trend toward cultural tourism; one that is seemingly incompatible with historical veracity. According to Laurajane Smith, the discourse of 'inauthenticity' that surrounds heritage performance is 'entered into as a means to maintain the authority and gravity of expert knowledge' (Smith, 2006: 69). This discourse has resulted in something of a scramble for legitimacy, measured and actualised in approximations of an (often cosmetic) 'reality'. For those involved in researching, scripting, taking part in and facilitating performance activity (especially re-enactments), authenticity has become a principal concern and aspiration, indeed we might note, a potential distraction (Tivers, 2002; Hunt, 2004). It has likewise become an important consideration for those *consuming* such performative responses to the past, namely, audiences (Bagnall, 2003 and as found in this study). It is perhaps easier to imagine that we can observe and critique an explicitly 'staged' authenticity in moments of performance; that they might hold themselves up rather more openly for scrutiny than other frames for the consumption of 'heritage'.

Theories of authenticity, as developed over the past forty years, have accompanied the rapid expansion in tourism and activities designed for 'the tourist' to consume[i]. Indeed, as noted by Waitt, the 'sale' of authenticity became a principle marketing technique within heritage contexts (Waitt, 1999: 836). Dean MacCannell, in 1976, recognised the desire of tourists for authentic experience but noted the difficulty in assessing how genuine such experiences might be. Highlighting both front and backstage activities (and envisaging a spectrum of activities in between), his notion of an intermediary space of *stage setting* is of course a useful analogy to performance activity; the term 'staged' never-the-less recurs as an assessment of 'false' authenticity in both literature (Cohen, 1988) and in the responses of our research participants.

Some have advocated that we abandon the term 'authenticity' completely (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006) as differences in definition, application and assessment seem irreconcilable. However, in the literature we can identify continuing analogies between authenticity and

some sense of 'reality' or 'truth'; according to Waitt, '[c]onventionally, its definitions involved such terms as accurate, genuine, real, true, or actual' (1999: 836). When it comes to the gaze of the audience or tourist, evaluating authenticity tends to involve 'looking for signs' that construct notions of place, reality and truth that we feel comfortable with (Urry, 1995). Seeking authenticity is then a condition of modern society, and increasingly of tourism [SLIDE] It is, according to Cohen, a way of reconciling the relationship between self, and an inherently inauthentic modern society. One place people seek such 'authenticity' is 'the past'.

The concept of authenticity is of course socially constructed (as 'heritage'), and Cohen prefers to configure it as a negotiated one. Selwyn goes further, indicating a differentiation between 'authenticity as knowledge' (cool authenticity) and 'authenticity as feeling' (hot authenticity). In this view, again one that proved a useful framework for analysis, our responses to heritage are at times emotional, and tied up in our notions of 'self', 'self-hood' and 'Other'. Ning Wang takes this further, citing a need to recognise the existential 'authenticity of *Being*', and its unique individual analysis and recognition; the search for an 'authentic self' (Wang, 1999).

In these more recent conceptualisations, our relationship with the authentic emerges as interpretive, negotiated and personal, as far from absolute and measurable (Waitt, 1999: 836). This is an understanding of 'the authentic' that I will come to in my analysis. However, Waitt observes that tourists (including, we might say, audiences for heritage performance) are less likely to recognise authenticity in these terms; happier with the 'true-false continuum', and seeking 'accuracy'. For this reason, it is with seemingly more systematic analyses of authenticity that I will start.

It will be seen that audiences are practised in making assessments of performance in terms of authenticity, and are well-versed in the rhetoric around the 'authentic'- these are terms that arose organically in discussions with our respondents. However, there is also, on occasion, a unique space being opened up for audiences to explore the complexity, density and multiplicity of heritage in ways that render their individual analysis of 'the authentic' a more subtle and useful aid to meaning making.

In the following sections, a number of audience responses are used to explore the analyses of authenticity that our respondents willingly performed. I refer explicitly to some of the themes

raised in that brief overview; namely Cosmetic, Staged, Object, and Hot authenticity. Rather than focusing on the factual and historical contextual 'accuracy' of audience responses I hope to demonstrate audience members often engaged in more nuanced utilisation of their critique.

1. 'Cosmetic' authenticity [SLIDE]

As recognised by MacCannell and Cohen in their studies, it was common for our respondents to use seemingly 'objective' criteria in their analyses of the authentic (in initial terms at least). Museum visitors have been sold heritage encounters in these terms for many years (and heritage performance is no exception), and respondents were keen to demonstrate an awareness of discourse around authenticity and the necessity, as they perceived it, of 'accuracy' in presentation. Faithfulness to narratives of history which are practised and familiar proved of great value to our participants, who rarely question the existence of an 'objective' and 'real' past, or its given as an aspiration. Our respondents were well versed in arguments that privilege the authentic over its necessary other, the 'fake', as in the first quote on screen:[ii]

> It was very authentic. They hadn't deliberately staged it. [CS2_S_PP3]

This notion of 'the stage' is one I will come back to, but is worth noting here as utilised in opposition to a supposedly objective authentic past.

It was often in terms of costume, language, and the authority of the material presentation that authenticity was initially and explicitly addressed (see latter quotations on the slide):

Such analysis of the authentic is unsurprising given the dialogues that surround heritage interpretation more broadly, and given the findings of those such as Cohen who have suggested that individuals are given to assessment along relatively superficial criteria. They are, in Reisinger and Steiner's terms, being 'theoretical' in their assessment of their experiences, and 'open to what is only so long as it fits their idea of what is' (Reisenger & Steiner, 2006:79). This kind of approach, they go on to say, reflects a need for control over experiences, and can indicate an inability to be open to the kinds of deeper engagement

which can come with participation, trying new things and exploring. Beyond this initial analysis however, the research began to unearth more intricate reflection, complicating debates around the extent to which authenticity can be 'staged' or indeed, 'stage managed'.

2. *Staged authenticity [SLIDE]*

After encountering performances, our respondents very often talked of having an increased sense of what 'the past' might have been like, and the number of allusions they make to this does not diminish over time (in conversations up to one year after the event). Respondents – for the most part – were under no illusions that what they saw was a dramatic presentation of sorts, but felt it uniquely enabled them to mentally inhabit, in the moment of performance at least, another temporal location. These memories often acted as hooks upon which other, more factual, information hung. This ongoing engagement with a 'past' was partly enabled through visitors' experience of sites as 'sets', and artefacts as 'props'; the performative nature of the museum is thus more than apparent to them:[iii]

Comments on the museum as setting for performance often focused simultaneously on the sense of place provided (a physical and intellectual link to the past), and a desire for 'displacement' (to be taken out of the reality of the museum, its familiarity and sets of expectations *into* that past). Museums are simultaneously twenty-first century spaces (with shops and cafes) and places steeped in the heritage(s) they seek to interpret. This 'doubleness' (Carlson 1996: 80) helps enable 'two contradictory realities' to be 'simultaneously in play' during performance (Schechner, 2002: 124; see also Jackson, 2000). Our respondents evidenced a willingness to suspend their disbelief and engaged playfully with the 'past' on offer; the museum as a 'playframe' thus becomes apparent (as in the quote on the slide):[iv]

RESP 1: That one, they were using the area, like when they were using the ship, the part of the museum that was like that, they used that as the ship. You could actually see what was going on. So, even though you know it's not a ship, it's quite nice.
RESP 2: It looks quite like it.
RESP 3: Well, it is; you just have to imagine it. (LAUGHS) [CS4_S_PP2]

It was important to our respondents that sites were not 'stages' (in a traditional, static sense), none the less, use of the words 'theatrical' and 'dramatic' was common in making sense of the space and their experience within it.

In one sense, to use MacCannell's differentiation, performance activity (when clearly identified as such) is a purely front stage activity, one that is explicitly and unabashedly touristic and prescribed. But on occasion, research respondents showed willingness to question the ways in which this prescription was being offered, to defy uncritical acceptance of the presentation being offered and to seek a 'back stage'. In participatory performance especially, this was something that they could seek (or even demand) in the moment, asking difficult questions, posing other points of view, or outright rejection of the narrative on offer. In this sense the explicit fictionality of drama can reveal questions that need to be asked about the sites interpretation more broadly (see slide):

There is little things that worry me slightly, for example when he was bringing up people to be the English fleet and the French and so on, that it was sort of, it was entertaining and humorous, which of course the real … wouldn't have. [CS1_F_PP1]

Evidenced here is a quality common to a significant number of our adult respondents, a desire to see performers, and by extension institutions, addressing the singularity of their narratives. We have seen in the research that performance can (when designed to do so) usefully start the process of re-complicating the heritage in question:

Most locations (for museum theatre presentations especially) are only temporarily theatricalised through performance, and their quick return to the normality of the museum even helps to highlight the transience of history and the impermanence of the people and stories that constitute it. In this sense, the staging of a heritage in an explicitly performative framework *can* help visitors to question their ideas about what constitutes authenticity, and even authority within the museum space.

As we have started to see, performance can occupy a number of liminal spaces and begin to facilitate their exploration[v]; frontstage/backstage, past/present, public/private, place/displace, active/passive, museum/theatre. Our respondents were necessarily active in their negotiation

of these juxtapositions, and more explicitly so than they often were in encounters with other forms of interpretation (which on occasion they readily dismiss as 'dry', 'static' and 'predictable'). This was true for their engagement with objects also.

3. Object authenticity [SLIDE]

Artefacts were perceived by our respondents as an integral part of an historical encounter and a demonstrably important part of the narrative of any museum visit. The way that objects are incorporated in performance thus impresses upon audience members, and they often become readily accessible as 'artefactual memories' (Urry, 1996), and witnesses to history (as on the slide):

Interestingly, at other times objects were taken for granted within the narrative, becoming almost incidental as 'props', as one respondent said:

they were using props from the museum to kind of relay the story. [CS4_I_PP3]

In Catherine Palmer's research, physical and material elements were identified as key signifiers of the historically authentic, they 'endure', which enhances their 'power and potency', and the survival of that which they represent (Palmer, 2003: 442). Our respondents had learned to have a respect and awe for any 'real' objects encountered, which is revealing of the ways in which prior visits to museums and historic sites have been framed. There was thus much discussion amongst research participants about the 'real' versus the 'replica'. Younger participants especially do not want to be caught out accepting without question something that later turns out to be 'fake' [SLIDE]:

I bet they don't even make those candles, or those spoons, or those cups, I don't believe that. [CS2_S_PP2]

The object thus remains unquestioned and legitimised evidence of, indeed is synonymous with, a singular heritage that is otherwise difficult for our respondents to access. As Urry attests however, a past assessed and evidenced in these simple terms 'partly obscures the social relations and struggles which underlay that past' (Urry, 1996: 52).

The variation in responses to objects in performance is not easily reconciled. The primacy of the artefact in recollections is perhaps not surprising given the reification of the object that often occurs at such sites (a trend carried through into site literature and promotions, even souvenirs).[vi] Deetz recognises that 'things have a special kind of immediacy' (2005: 375), yet, as Riegel comments, in the traditional museum narrative 'It is the visitor who is in motion, and the objects, and by implication the relationships they embody, are all curiously lifeless' (1996: 86). Objects are a taken-for-granted means of 'accessing' the past, yet their use in performance requires different forms of identification; a recognition of the collision between their role as perceived objective manifestations of knowledge and as 'things' whose use value and/or tangibility is being demonstrated: they are 'alive'. Rather than being organised solely within conceptual frames as in the exhibition (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), their framing is now demonstrably performative. This opens up new and exciting avenues for the exploration of their multiple significations. We noted in the research that when an audience had to work in more intricate and involved ways with artefacts in order to make meaning (holding, using, critiquing or even making objects), they became a more tangible and useful legacy of the site visit.

4. Hot authenticity [SLIDE]

It is not only material aspects of the heritage on offer which enable a sense of the past to be engendered. The importance of individual entry narratives in the meaning making process cannot be overstated (Falk, 2006). For Lisa Roberts (1997), the museum narrative itself is crafted by individuals based on who they are and what they think. This was also evident in our respondents' comments, a sense of the past is greatly facilitated in performance that strikes a chord with visitors' own memories and experiences. According to Bagnall (2003: 91) their biographies become 'sources' for 'emotional mapping', and thus perceptions of the authenticity of the story recounted are aided by the authenticity of the feelings and memories engendered. This is a phenomenon recognised by Gaynor Kavanagh in her positioning of museums as dream spaces (on the slide):

…the process of remembering can be a very individual matter, a defining part of the self. Whether moved to anger, tears or sheer unadulterated boredom, the position of self within that response is undeniable (Kavanagh, 2000: 4)

Kavanagh goes on to add that an understanding of this 'becomes essential to appreciating how and indeed whether museums communicate' (ibid.[vii]). There is nothing inevitable in this process of locating the self within (or indeed outside of) the heritage on offer, but it was certainly true in the research that an ability to empathise with or feel ownership over the narratives being portrayed (wherever these feelings stem from) made that sense of the past more urgent, tangible and, for our respondents, memorable. In this sense, it can be seen that the museum is indeed communicating [SLIDE]:

Our respondents sometimes saw it as (no less than) the responsibility of the institution to highlight the difficult nature of the heritage being interpreted. In such instances, to stop short of inspiring 'hot' authenticity of feeling was seen as a failure on the part of the institution to do their duty to that heritage; the performance activity becomes less 'legitimate' as a result (as on the SLIDE):

...it shouldn't spare people from the violence, it isn't something like a computer game it is an actual thing that happened. In other words you shouldn't patronise people by assuming that they can't cope with watching something horrific. If they can't, well they'll leave won't they? [CS4_I_PP3]

Acknowledging this complexity not only adds to the process of knowledge construction, but is also key to enabling a questioning of and reflection on assumptions about where and who constitutes authority. This was especially powerful in performances utilising more than one voice. The immediacy of the arguments being played out in front of audiences through multiple voices/characters (not necessarily multiple actors, see Jackson, 2011) was something that participants found shocking, illuminating, and above all, memorable. In such performance, the 'totalising narratives' (Hutcheon, 2002) of past interpretations began to give way to an intricate exploration of the composition of heritage.

Conclusions

As knowledge is based on individual perspectives, so too will be any account of or aspiration to authenticity. None-the-less, perceptions of authenticity remain crucial to individuals' meaning making processes, and a quality that our respondents have become accustomed to making judgements about based no doubt on their understanding of cultural authority – where it exists and how it is evaluated, in and by the museum. However, usefully complicating the meaning making process through the inclusion of multiple voices, and more challenging conceptualisations of what 'heritage' is, enabled our respondents to explore the physicality, multiplicity and complexity of the past in ways that felt new, shocking and memorable. In *these* moments, their active questioning of the performance's 'authenticity' became an aid to meaning making rather than a hindrance.

As Bradburne recognises, this is more in tune with the reflective museum of the twenty-first century [SLIDE]:

It is in the spirit of the piazza that the museum must be a public forum, a place where all voices can be heard, differences explored, similarities compared. To fulfil its role in the next century, the museum must wean itself from the need to dispense the truth from on high – it must give up being top-down. The museum does not make culture, it does not shape identity, it does not have all the answers. The museum plays a potentially far more important role. It preserves culture, registers identity – it has questions. (Bradburne, 2000: 391)

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[i] For more on authenticity see MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1988; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Waitt, 1999; Urry, 1995; Selwyn, 1996; Wang, 1999).

[ii] "… identifying some cultural expressions or artefacts as authentic, genuine, trustworthy, or legitimate simultaneously implies that other manifestations are fake, spurious, and even illegitimate." (Bendix, 1997: 9).

[iii] As Urry, 1996 also demonstrates.

[iv] As Carlson states, 'Whatever the suspension of disbelief visitors bring to these encounters, they are obviously aware of their performative nature' (Carlson, 1996: 109).

This does not preclude audience members from being able to actively and vigorously critique what they see.

[v] Victor Turner's concept of liminality is an important one in performance research, see Turner, 1974 and on ritual behaviours and optation in Turner, 1982.

[vi] Ames states that 'The dominance of objects in the work of museums also dominates the theoretical imaginations of those working in museums' (2005: 45).

[vii] The museum as communicator is an aspiration identified by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2005).