



Rethinking measures of cultural vitality, wellbeing and citizenship  
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## Heritage as a cultural measure in a postcolonial setting\*

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**Abstract:** *The problematic that defines heritage is no more dramatically contested than in Australia and other postcolonial societies which are finding it hard to include the cultural heritage of the previous cultures that inhabited the area, thus contributing to the problematic of cultural measurement. Heritage is defined on different levels. My PhD case study, the rock art in the Dampier Archipelago (Western Australia) can be considered international, national, state, local and on top of that Aboriginal heritage. Whereas other countries such as Mexico or France have dealt with the problem more easily, there are case studies in Australia where Aboriginal heritage is being denied the status of cultural heritage, and thus marginalizing it. This is in fact caused by the cross-cultural entanglement in which the concept of heritage is still defined within Western methodologies, the culmination of which is reflected in UNESCO's "beautiful visions and pious hopes" as Homi Bhabha claims.*

*Thus, the attempt to democratize the process of cultural measurement cannot be made, until Aboriginal heritage is considered along other important heritage sites. As not every site is measured with the same scale and against the same values, a division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage is drawn. In turn, this division causes neglect, and in some extreme cases, the removal and destruction of Aboriginal heritage sites. Since the industries established in the Dampier Archipelago in the 1960s, Aboriginal heritage sites have been subjected to the whims of the industry causing destruction of the petroglyphs and the local Aboriginal community. In this paper I will argue that measuring Aboriginal culture has considerably failed in this regard in Australia, leading to an unbalanced cultural heritage system.*

**Keywords:** cultural heritage, rock art, Aboriginal heritage, Dampier Archipelago.

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### Situating Heritage

The definition of heritage has been stretching in the last decades. It has changed from merely situating heritage in meaningful buildings to sites, and eventually including oral histories and traditions. It went from

considering only tangible heritage to include what is known as intangible heritage, reaching a climax in 2003, when the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was drafted and adopted by

many countries.<sup>1</sup> The UNESCO definition of intangible heritage “is based on the considerations of recognizing the formerly marginalized forms of heritage”. The categories of intangible and tangible form the whole concept of cultural heritage. Furthermore, according to Yin’s criticism, the definition makes emphasis on “the traditional nature of Intangible Cultural Heritage”, thus failing “to fully recognize the intangible cultural forms of the Western world or dominant groups.” Yin even alerts to the fact that “all proclamations of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (...) are notably from the minority communities in developing countries.”<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, we have seen how the protection and conservation of heritage has been voiced and expressed by single, eminent, visible, authority voices (John Ruskin, Eugene Viollet Le Duc or Cesare Brandi to name a few), to a whole array of anonymous, invisible experts (sometimes whole organizations like the Getty Institute, UNESCO or ICOMOS) working in different fields and from different cultures. We have witnessed the development of heritage from an idea to a discipline. We are far from the days when heritage was simply defined as “all kinds of goods, but in its true significance it is a family good: sometimes the same, underlying its provenance from a succession or donation from a direct line.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yin, Tongyun, 2006, “Museum and the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage”, *The Ethic Arts*, issue 6, npa.; Ahmad, Yahaya, 2006, “The Scope and Definitions of Heritage: From Tangible to Intangible”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12 (3), pp. 292–300.

<sup>2</sup> Yin, 2006, npa.

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des*

And from the different disciplines that assess heritage (including society, local and external, which gives heritage a social value), the values of heritage come from. The philosopher will look for an aesthetic value; the historian/archaeologist will record historical value, and so on. “Only recently has the conservation field begun to embrace such factors as economics, cultural change, public policy, and social issues.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, heritage is multivalent and is conceptualized differently by each stakeholder, according to each stakeholder’s experience, cultural and economic background, religious creed, race and gender. Multivalence “is an essential quality of heritage and (...) logically suggests a pluralistic, eclectic approach to value assessment.”<sup>5</sup> Heritage is multivalent because its values are contingent/extrinsic, not intrinsic or inherent. In other words, they are artificially and subjectively ascribed by the many stakeholders, and these differ according to many factors such as class, race, gender

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*métiers, etc.* Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert (eds). University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>. Original in French, translation by the author.

<sup>4</sup> Mason, R. 2002, p. 299. “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices” in de la Torre, M. *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage. Research Report*. The Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, p. 8. Ahmad proposes that a common terminology should be defined, so organizations like UNESCO and ICOMOS would define it, and each country would adopt it on a national level. 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Mason, 2002, p. 8.

and politics. It is the human mind that endows heritage with values. The value of heritage arises from interaction, rather than mere observation or description. This happens because heritage, as culture, is constantly reinterpreted; is an (active) process.<sup>6</sup> For example, when heritage is neglected and thus destroyed, it is as a result of change in the values.

The old model to assess heritage implied that archaeologists would “read off” the intrinsic meaning of heritage and write it down on their reports. This is not the case anymore.<sup>7</sup> According to Mason, the values of heritage “cannot be objectively measured and broken down”. This in turn causes that heritage practitioners are constantly re-inventing the wheel.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, the meaning of heritage has changed from a universal, static, stable, intrinsic and fixed concept to a more flexible, extrinsic, contingent,

“constructed out of the various social contexts of the object, building, or site” meaning. According to Mason, both methods of assessing heritage, interaction and observation, are valid in order to know the meaning of heritage:

“(…) anything defined as heritage is said to intrinsically and tautologically possess some kind of heritage value (though the nature of that value is not intrinsically given). On the other hand, the contingent/constructed viewpoint rightly points to value-formation factors *outside* the object itself and emphasizes the important social processes of value formation. Recognizing the fundamental contingency of heritage values does not preclude the possibility of some values that are universally held (or nearly so). These socially constructed values (...) are seen as universal because they are so widely held, not because they are objective truths.”<sup>9</sup>

Heritage promotes and offers stability (political, psychological and emotional), international, national or local identity, a sense of belonging, as well as a process of meaning-making. It also promotes official and subversive ideologies. It is inclusive and exclusive, active rather than passive. Heritage is patrimony, art and history. It appeals to the past, present and future generations, by signalling and indexing memory. It serves memory by stimulating a “reaction to the past.”<sup>10</sup> According to Mason, it plays “instrumental, symbolic, and other functions in society.”<sup>11</sup>

The problem is that the link and connectedness of heritage to all these

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is so active that nowadays, Byrne claims, a self-awareness of the importance and relevance of the *discourse of heritage* is appropriated by certain groups (appreciating heritage is an acquired taste), thus resulting into situations in which “a heritage professional cannot (...) go into a local community to assess the social significance of an old place without finding that the community’s expression of that significance is not in some way influenced or structured by received concepts of heritage.” Byrne, 2008, p. 164-166. “Heritage as Social Action” in Fairclough, G. et al. (eds.), *The Heritage Reader*, Routledge: London, pp. 149-173.

<sup>7</sup> Byrne et al., 2001, p. 57. *Social significance. A discussion paper*. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service: Hurstville.

<sup>8</sup> Mason, 2002, p. 9.

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<sup>9</sup> Mason, 2002, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Mason, 2002, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Mason, 2002, p. 8.

ideas and situations is somehow artificial, invented, and in some cases recent, thus not authentic.<sup>12</sup> In other words, heritage serves several masters and can be used by any group, force, government or individual with a discourse behind in order to promote their own agendas and obliterate others; they artificially construct “heritage”. This is possible because it is defined against other factors such as class, race, gender and politics, and by selecting certain ideas, symbols and cultures, others are excluded. Heritage is a framework to understand and interpret a variety of objects and ideas, which are in turn heritage. It is a measure that cannot be measured.

Finally, it is not possible to think about heritage without politics. According to Mason, “all values attributed to heritage are, in fact, political, in that they are part of the power struggles and exertions that determine the fate of heritage.”<sup>13</sup> For example, what is the concept of heritage, in regards to prehistoric art, concealing in France? The fact that some of the art could have been made by Neanderthals rather than Homo-sapiens. Instead, the art is simply regarded as heritage, not only prehistoric heritage, which could amount to have been made either by Neanderthal or Homo

sapiens.<sup>14</sup> However, by labelling it heritage, it becomes important, valuable and meaningful, no matter its origin.

Notwithstanding the advances on heritage studies and heritage theory, valuing and protecting heritage, and its social significance, in post-colonial settings is a still difficult task, and the case of Australia is actually put to the test. Although the *Burra Charter* has been amended in several occasions in order to “reflect the current concern of heritage and conservation in Australia, including conservation of intangible values”,<sup>15</sup> evaluating Aboriginal heritage is it still a delicate issue, as my case study (the Dampier Archipelago) exemplifies.

### **Heritage in Australia**

Intrinsic values can overlap extrinsic values, because intrinsic values are seen as universal, whereas *local* people have *local* values. Thus, Aboriginal people have aboriginal values, not local or universal values. However, the significance of these values is not assessed in relation to the Aboriginal community; in other words: “Since ‘particular significance’ depends on ‘Aboriginal tradition’, how it is assessed will be determined by how ‘tradition’ is read within current heritage discourse.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Guillermo Bonfil Batalla affirms that even the notion of the so-called universal heritage is nothing else than the selection of certain goods from a variety of cultures, based on essentially western criteria. Original in Spanish. Translation by the author. In “Nuestro patrimonio cultural: un laberinto de significados” in Florescano, E. (ed.) 1997, p. 32. *El patrimonio nacional de México, I*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, CONACULTA: México, pp. 28-57.

<sup>13</sup> Mason, 2002, p. 11.

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<sup>14</sup> I am in debt to Nicholas Zorzin, Post-doctoral Endeavour Fellow at the University of Melbourne 2012, for pointing this out to me.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmad, 2006, p. 297.

<sup>16</sup> Greer, S. and Henry, R., 1996, p. 21. “The politics of heritage: the case of the Kuranda Skyrail” in Finlayson, J. and Jackson-Nakano, A. Heritage and Native Title: Anthropological and Legal Perspectives. Proceedings of a Workshop conducted by the Australian Anthropological Society and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, The Australian National University,

In the case of the Dampier Archipelago,

“Some research workers have too readily assumed that what was most appealing to them would naturally have been the major concern of the Aborigines. This bias towards the spectacular has allowed not only the perspective to become distorted, but has by-passed the relevance of the [Aboriginal] petroglyphs, neglecting their specific and well defined position in the world of Aboriginal mythology.”<sup>17</sup>

This happened because heritage, in Australia, was defined by archaeologists, reflecting their concerns and interests, and disregarding the concerns and interests of the heritage owners.<sup>18</sup> This archaeological discourse of heritage has been proved inefficient to evaluate and protect some, but not all, Aboriginal heritage sites. When legislation to “protect” Aboriginal sites was approved, heritage became an institution. However, this legislation did not prevent the destruction of rock art sites by the hand of industrial development.<sup>19</sup>

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Canberra, 14-15 February 1996. Native Title Research Unit. AIATSIS: Canberra, pp. 16-27.

<sup>17</sup> Palmer, 1977, p. 47. “Myth, ritual and rock art.” *Archaeology & Physical Anthropology in Oceania*. Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 38-50.

<sup>18</sup> Greer, S. and Henry, R., 1996, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Greer, S. and Henry, R., 1996, p. 16. Moreover, the dilemma does not lie in ineffective legislation (local, state, national, international), but on the fact that it is based on and framed by the scientific discourse of heritage (the archaeological discourse of heritage), as operated by archaeologists. Greer, S. and Henry, R., 1996, p. 22.

Australia adopted many of the standard ways to interpret, protect, define and represent heritage that are common practice in other countries, where heritage is regulated, defined and managed by national organizations or state institutes, rather than the local community<sup>20</sup>. In this sense, heritage was charged with the task of building a nation<sup>21</sup>, forgetting and erasing the previous cultures that were impacted by colonialism and post colonialism, without taking into account the immense significance that they attached to sites. It was not until multiculturalism became the official ideology in Australia<sup>22</sup>, that organizations like the National Trust or the Australian Heritage Council considered an Aboriginal heritage site like the Dampier Archipelago a significant cultural landscape, but failing to include its social value.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the institution of heritage also established national identity by stretching back the history of Australia, providing older dates of occupation by the original inhabitants. In other words, the prehistory of Australia (a young country) was “discovered” by the institution of heritage. This also proved effective for the Aboriginal community as it offered

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<sup>20</sup> cf. Byrne, 2008, p.150.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Graham et al. 2005, p. 27. “The uses and abuses of heritage”, in Corsane, G. (ed), *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, Routledge: London, pp. 26-37.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, 2002, p.2. “The Political Economy of Iconotypes and the Architecture of destination: Uluru, The Sydney Opera House and the World Trade Center”. *Architectural Theory Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 1-44.

<sup>23</sup> Available here <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/national-assessments/dampier-archipelago/pubs/dampier-archipelago.pdf>, pp. 7-10. Accessed 15 June 2012.

an alternative history of Australia<sup>24</sup>, making them visible. Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century “discovered” their prehistoric past, and so Australia was “discovering” its own in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, the institution of heritage was legitimizing the past, or for a much better expression, the institution of heritage was also constructing the past. According to Greer and Henry, the archaeological discourse of heritage, as a framework, appropriated the unstable concept of the past.<sup>25</sup>

### Heritage in the Dampier Archipelago

According to experts, the Dampier Archipelago is arguably the largest rock art site in the world, because it hosts around one million petroglyph’s motifs.<sup>26</sup> These petroglyphs are the work of the Aboriginal groups who inhabited the archipelago, before they were heavily impacted due to the fatal consequences of colonialism. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, an array of explorers and settlers visited and established themselves in the area, without noticing the petroglyphs. Since the 1960s several industries (gas and iron ore mainly) operate in the area, and as a consequence a significant percentage of the petroglyphs were

removed and destroyed.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the patrimonial values of this Aboriginal heritage were neglected.

Destroying heritage means it is not valued in the culture where it is situated. Otherwise, it would be preserved. In this case, the intrinsic values of the petroglyphs were completely disregarded and neglected. They were not considered part of the Australian culture, but rather a product of Aboriginal culture, a remnant of the past. Their significance was not particularly relevant for the prevailing ideology. Rather than trying to “tame the foreign object” (if we can borrow Serge Gruzinski’s expression)<sup>28</sup>, the Aboriginal culture was not positively valorised.

In the words of Bonfil Batalla, the petroglyphs’ meanings were reinterpreted: they remain silent, without being incorporated directly into the system of significant objects; only a sporadic event would make them present in the significant universe.<sup>29</sup> The sporadic event was indeed its destruction.

On the other hand, the extrinsic values of the site, *archaeological* values to be more precise, were recognized in 2007

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<sup>24</sup> Greer, S. and Henry, R., 1996, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Greer, S. and Henry, R., 1996, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Vinnicombe, P. 2002, “Petroglyphs of the Dampier Archipelago: background to development and descriptive analysis.” *Rock Art Research* 19: pp. 3–27; Mulvaney, K, 2010, “Murujuga Marni – Dampier Petroglyphs. Shadows in the landscape. Echoes across time.” Unpublished PhD thesis. University of New England. These calculations are made by extrapolating data from significant sites to the whole area, although full survey has ever been made in regards to the amount of petroglyphs.

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<sup>27</sup> Bednarik considers 25% of the petroglyphs are lost, while Donaldson is more conservative: 5%. Bednarik, 2002, p. 30, “The survival of the Murujuga (Burrup) petroglyphs.” *Rock Art Research*. Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 29-40. 2006, p. 26, *Australian Apocalypse. The story of Australia’s greatest cultural monument*. Occasional AURA Publication 14, Australian Rock Art Research Association, Inc.: Melbourne; Donaldson, 2009, *Burrup Rock Art. Ancient Aboriginal rock art of Burrup Peninsula and Dampier Archipelago*. Wildrocks Publications: Western Australia, p. 512.

<sup>28</sup> Gruzinski, S. 2001. *Images at War: Mexico From Columbus to Blade Runner (1492–2019)*. Duke University Press: Durham.

<sup>29</sup> Bonfil Batalla, 1997, p. 39. Original in Spanish. Translation by the author.

when the archipelago was listed as National Heritage.

I argue that the cause of this problem is due to four factors:

- *Social value*

The problematic with being inclusive and taking into account all the values concerning a specific heritage site, is how to choose the relevant value amongst all. According to Mason,

“Values in heritage conservation have traditionally been treated in one of two ways: (1) one kind of value predominates and blots out consideration of others; or (2) values are treated as a black box, with all aspects of heritage value collapsed into “significance.”<sup>30</sup>

Both are problematic and can be exclusive in their own way. As an example of the first case is the fact that the archaeological discourse of heritage privileges the visual value over other senses, disregarding other values that may not be evident at first sight. For example, the social value that Aboriginal communities place on their relationship with the land and country. Social value has been underestimated on a large scale, a tendency that is now, nevertheless, being reversed.

As an example of the second way, Byrne has noted that in contemporary Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal people

“have felt compelled to use the language of the ‘sacred’ to describe values which ostensibly are secular. A shell midden, for instance, may in the present day have taken on symbolic meanings and emotional associations which have no precedent in

‘traditional’ culture. Some Aboriginal people, when they are present at such places are overcome by a sense of the presence of the ‘old people’ and a sadness for what happened to them – a sadness about the violence of the frontier period and the later oppression of the Protection era. In a situation where the heritage system only has one category for these sites (shell midden – archaeological) and has only been responsive to two categories of value or significance (archaeological and sacred/Dreaming) it may happen that Aboriginal people describe such sites as ‘sacred’. They may do so not so much for want of a better word as for want of a heritage system (and heritage professionals) capable of acknowledging that there are authentic ways of valuing places in present day Aboriginal society which are uniquely to do with the present day.

In James Clifford’s terms, the established heritage system, in this case, is failing to acknowledge the inventive quality of contemporary Aboriginal culture. Specifically, it is failing to acknowledge that a prehistoric shell midden can be recycled back into Aboriginal culture with a new meaning. Failing to acknowledge, in other words, that the place’s significance can be up-dated and failing, to use Clifford’s terms again, to acknowledge that the place could be given a ‘local future’.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Aboriginals were forced to create corporations in order to express

<sup>30</sup> Mason, R. 2002, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Byrne et al., 2001, pp. 60-61.

their concerns about the destruction of their heritage, within the archaeological discourse of heritage. But these corporations are nothing else than a foreign method, filled with business vocabulary that pretends to engulf concerns about heritage from a business perspective. In other words, the structure and organization of an Indigenous corporation is in debt with any type of corporation whose aim is to turn profits. In addition, as Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy has asserted:

“The recognition of social value is enshrined in key Australian heritage legislation and government policies, but until recently has largely been overlooked. This has led to an inequity in the effective conservation of places of community value and an overemphasis on places of 'scientific' significance or value. In turn, this has meant that Australian community groups, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have had to develop an increasingly sophisticated grasp of scientific jargon to secure the conservation of places of value to them under the guise of other accepted and well-defined categories of significance.”<sup>32</sup>

The social value of the site has not always been considered by the heritage assessments, the industrial and archaeological surveys, and the settlers. Therefore, a gap between the

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<sup>32</sup> McIntyre-Tamwoy, S. 2004, p. 183, “Places people value: Social significance and cultural exchange in post-invasion Australia” In Harrison, R. and Williamson, C. *After Captain Cook: The archaeology of the recent indigenous past in Australia*. Indigenous Archaeologies Series. Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, California, USA, pp. 171-190.

local Aboriginal community and the industries emerged, but with the creation of Aboriginal Corporations, such as the Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation, Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation, and the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, they represent the Aboriginal community, and the social values of the site are now being expressed. According to the Burra Charter, social value “embraces the qualities for which a place has become a focus of spiritual, political, national or other cultural sentiment to a majority or minority group”.

But for the eyes of the industry, the social value of the place in terms of heritage was the least important value and not considered important when the first modern industries established in the 1960s. The lack of indigenous corporations made the concern virtually unknown. The significance of the petroglyphs and the site for the Aboriginal community is intangible and cannot be measured, explained or defined in terms of Western methodologies (for example, semiotic, iconographic, hermeneutic)<sup>33</sup>. Their meaning is considered too sacred to be revealed, thus for the uninitiated, they are empty symbols. When the authors of a report in 1964<sup>34</sup> compared the art found in Depuch Island (Western Australia) to world-renowned prehistoric art galleries as the caves of Lascaux in the Dordogne, and Altamira in northern Spain, the comparison was actually effective

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<sup>33</sup> cf. Johnston, 1994. “What is Social Value?” Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra, excerpts from What is Heritage website (<http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au>).

<sup>34</sup> Ride, W. D. L. *et al.* 1964. “Report on the Aboriginal Engravings and Flora and Fauna of Depuch Island Western Australia.” The Western Australia Museum. Special Publication No. 2.



because Depuch Island was not disturbed, but remained problematic because it evidenced the scarce knowledge that the Australian archaeological community had towards their own heritage.

To complicate matters even more, Native Title rights are only recognized if Aboriginal claimants are "able to prove *continuous* links to the area".<sup>35</sup> This is difficult because the Aboriginal tribes who originally occupied the archipelago were annihilated due to the impact of colonialism, and the few survivors were forced to emigrate to nearby stations or seek refuge in missions.<sup>36</sup> Although Native Title rights have been granted, the industries are still operating in the area, whilst some others are right now being incorporated to the landscape. The value that the natural resources turn into profits are more valuable than the native title rights that precede the discovery of the natural resources.

- *Levels of heritage*

As we have seen, heritage, as a cultural measure, sometimes functions based on an inclusion and exclusion; heritage is appropriated and alienated according to the circumstances. These levels can be sometimes very problematic because by including a site in one of them, it also excludes it from another. In turn, the polysemy of

the concept actually culminates into a semioclastism, the destruction of meaning. What meaning should we then accept? When does one jurisdiction end and the other begin? According to the 1964 Venice Charter,

"It is essential that the principles guiding the preservation and restoration of ancient buildings should be agreed and laid down on an international basis, with each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions."

The Dampier Archipelago is defined on different levels. Some assessments have been made in order to seek the nomination of the World Heritage List but with no avail.<sup>37</sup> At a national level, the Burrup Peninsula<sup>38</sup> and the archipelago are considered National Heritage since 2007 by the Australian Heritage Council (AHC). Within Western Australia the site is recognized in relation to the rich deposits of natural resources rather than the cultural values the area possesses.<sup>39</sup> According to the guidelines provided by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs of the state of

<sup>35</sup> Flood, 2006, p. 245. *The Original Australians. Story of the Aboriginal People*. Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, N. S. W.

<sup>36</sup> Gara. T. J. 1983. "The Flying Foam Massacre: an incident on the North-West Frontier, Western Australia." in Smith, M. (ed.), *Archaeology at ANZAAS 1983*. Anthropology Department, Western Australian Museum, pp. 86-94: Perth; 1984. *The Aborigines of the Dampier Archipelago: an ethnohistory of the Yaburarra*. Unpublished paper. Western Australian Museum: Perth.

<sup>37</sup> Available here <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/national-assessments/dampier-archipelago/pubs/outstanding-universal-values-may2012.pdf> Accessed 15 June 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Peninsula is actually the wrong name, since the Burrup Peninsula (also known as Murujuga) is connected to the mainland by an artificial causeway that was built in the 1960s. It is also the largest island of the archipelago and where the majority of petroglyphs are found.

<sup>39</sup> Kuhlenbeck, B. 2010. *Re-Writing Spatiality: The Production of Space in the Pilbara Region in Western Australia*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, AL.

Western Australia, the site is also an Aboriginal heritage site (DIA). On the other hand, the local Aboriginal community considers the place sacred because of their petroglyphs, and equally important is for the non-aboriginal employees working in many of the industries established in the area, since it is the place where they work, live and have built significant social relationships for the last past years. In other words, these are the contingent or extrinsic values of the site.<sup>40</sup> Although some of the towns are relatively young, especially Dampier and Karratha built in the 1960s, non-Aboriginal stories attached to the site have already emerged.<sup>41</sup> The site is clearly multivalent.

- *Secular or sacred?*

Aboriginal heritage and non-Aboriginal heritage cannot be measured or valued in similar terms. Choosing to convert a sacred site into a secular site like the Dampier Archipelago becomes problematic, because it is precisely its sacred reference for many Aboriginal groups what makes it distinctive and important. By turning the site into an industrial site, a more secular essence takes over the archipelago and the fact that people work and live there, reinforces the idea that a work-site should be secular, rather than sacred.

How do we record, protect and interpret sacred “invisible” meanings that are found in sites such as the archipelago? We should bear in mind that some images are restricted and thus can only be seen by the initiated. This restriction is a fact that we must take into account before starting any

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<sup>40</sup> Mason, 2008, p. 100.

<sup>41</sup> The most famous is the story about the “Red Dog”. Several books telling the story and deeds of this dog have been published and can be bought at the Karratha Visitor Centre. A film based on the stories was released in 2011.

assessment of heritage or aesthetic values. In other words, how do we make the unseen, seen: the invisible, visible?

This question was largely answered in the discussions that took place in Byzantium and the Reformation. The problematic was to depict god and how the representation of the divine could be achieved. This, however, was not easily done, as many people died trying to defend images as the perfect vehicle in order to represent intangible values such as god. Many others died because they firmly believed that the invisible, the intangible and the unseen (but felt and experienced) could not be depicted. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are dealing with a similar problem because we need to record, protect and interpret the values and meanings that for the Aboriginal people around the world are important but nevertheless cannot be fitted into a medium such as the image. However, we have the concept of heritage, and as such, it is possible to use it properly in order make visible and seen the invisible and unseen meanings that the Aboriginal people can actually feel.

- *Intangible values*

How can we measure intangible values? If we cannot measure them, at least we can acknowledge them. Theory tells us that we tend to privilege physical sites over the social meaning. Yin divides intangible heritage (and as a consequence, its values) in two groups:

“one is the Intangible Cultural Heritage that used to live and be practiced within original natural and social context. Because of the historical development and changes of social constructions, the original functions of this kind of Intangible Cultural Heritage have entirely disappeared. Consequently, the once-complex holistic tradition has been reduced into symbols of

aspects of culture. (...) Its original meanings and representations have diminished as the changes of social and cultural contexts.”

The other

“is still living and being practiced within its natural and social context. This type of Intangible Cultural Heritage is viewed as both traditional and contemporary in the sense that the traditional culture and folklore form a living culture that is still a vibrant and self-identified part of cultural communities’ lives. Most aboriginal, indigenous and minority cultural heritage can be put into this group.”<sup>42</sup>

The fact that intangible values such as the social value cannot be represented or depicted by an image or for that matter, a number, adds to the difficulty for some cultures to understand and recognize the social value that exists on a site for a certain community or group. As Byrne claims: “[i]t is easy (...) to forget they are products of culture rather than constituting culture itself.”<sup>43</sup> The emphasis is on the fabric of the culture, rather than its continuing practice.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusions

Rock art survives around the margins of art history. Likewise, rock art when considered heritage clearly remains underrepresented not only in Australia, but around the world. According to the Australian Heritage Council in Australia alone, of the 114 heritage places registered in the Australian Heritage Council, only six are rock art sites. That represents only the 5.2%. In regards to the UNESCO’s World

Heritage list, the percentage is even lower: between 1-4%.<sup>45</sup>

Until the natural resources, like gas, are finished, the industries will not leave the area. Therefore a balance between socio-cultural values and economic values as proposed by Mason should be addressed, rather than the model proposed by Byrne<sup>46</sup>, because of the huge economic profit, derived from the exploitation of the natural resources. The economic value should be included because in the last years different companies established in the area have made, in one way or in another, generous donations to the local Aboriginal community in different forms. For example, the first book published on a large scale for a non-expert audience on the rock art was possible through the help of Rio Tinto.<sup>47</sup>

This might be seen as a small gesture that cannot after all compensate for all the destruction they have caused. But on the other hand it is also an extension of the extrinsic values that the local community has built throughout the years for the place they see as their workplace and home. These values, obviously based on an economic value, are nevertheless important (even if they are relatively new). These economic values should be made known, because it will represent the value the site has for the industries. In other words, because the industries in the archipelago are not valuing the site for its images, then we must know why they think the site is valuable. For the industries in the area, “quantitative methods remain the

<sup>42</sup> Yin, 2006, n.p.a.

<sup>43</sup> Byrne, 2008, p.151.

<sup>44</sup> Greer, S. and Henry, R., 1996, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> McDonald and Veth, 2011, p. 57. “Study of the Outstanding Universal Values of The Dampier Archipelago Site, Western Australia.” Jo McDonald Cultural Heritage Management Pty Ltd. Report to the Australian Heritage Council: Canberra.

<sup>46</sup> Byrne *et al.*, 2001, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Donaldson, M. 2009.

lingua franca for policy makers.”<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, it is imperative to know the economic value of the archipelago in terms of how much do the local community actually gain from living in a sacred Aboriginal site, rather than in a non-sacred Aboriginal site? And more importantly, a hardly publicized Aboriginal site, in terms of tourism and economic profits.

If social value is applied to the site, it should be equally applied to the whole local community, not only for the Aboriginal community. In addition, art from the area does not only include the petroglyphs, as Fred Williams, a non-Aboriginal contemporary painter was influenced by the Pilbara landscapes to produce his work.

The creation of the *Burra Charter* and the expansion of the concept of “culture” by the UNESCO in 2006 to include intangible heritage, helped to establish the importance of the social value attached to a heritage site. Thus, an assessment of the site based on the *Burra Charter*, would show the immense social value that the site has for the local Aboriginal community in terms of spiritual and sacred values attached to the land, country and rock art, as well as the local non-Aboriginal community. The social value in this area should be assessed by the people who have interpreted, valued, felt, lived and used the heritage. We need to think about the future and the past, not only the present, in terms of the socio-cultural and economic values of this heritage site.

This of course might result in controversy, but if we accept the premise that multiculturalism is the official ideology of Australia, then all interested parties (with their tangible and intangible values; Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), need to be included in a new heritage management plan. Otherwise, the site will not be

representing the official ideology (another extrinsic value of heritage), and will be converted into an empty, un-interpreted, dispossessed site, but nevertheless, full of meanings. In Homi Bhabha’s words, we should embrace both possession and dis-possession in order to “construct a discourse of heritage that truly” understands “the trials and tribulations of the ethical (...) obligation of cultural transmission.”<sup>49</sup>

If Uluru and the Sydney Opera House are the two poles of the Australian heritage, each representing a different history, discourse, past and symbol, why then can the first art in Australia not be widely accepted as heritage, not only locally or nationally, but also internationally? By nominating the Dampier Archipelago as World Heritage Site, Australia would be teaching a valuable lesson to the rest of the world in terms of evaluating not only cultural heritage in a postcolonial setting, but *heritage* in general.

How do we understand heritage? We understand it as a label that can name several different attitudes towards a same object. Some of the attitudes were influenced by colonialism and even today they are embedded in the commercial language of enterprises, guidelines and rules, excluding everything that is not considered within the stated guidelines. However, some theorists have started to challenge this view because heritage is more complicated than that. I, for one, accept the fact that it is a useful tool to

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<sup>48</sup> Mason, 2008, p. 110.

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<sup>49</sup> Bhabha, H. 2009, p. 47. “On Global Memory. Reflections on Barbaric Transmission”. In Anderson, J. (ed.) *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence. The Proceedings of the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Congress in the History of Art. (Comité International d’Histoire de l’Art, CIHA). The University of Melbourne, 13-18 January 2008*. Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, pp. 46-56.

build, but it is also a weapon to destroy.

Perhaps the solution to this problem is to apply what Mexican anthropologist Bonfil Batalla suggested a few years ago in regards to the situation of Indigenous heritage in Mexico (another postcolonial setting), when he

claimed that once and for all, we should “learn to see the West from our own rich and varied cultural configuration [Indigenous, colonial and postcolonial], instead of keep looking at” the Indigenous heritage “only through the narrow optic of western culture.”

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