

Regeneration and Heritage: Considering Static Heritage Narratives in Housing-Led Regeneration

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KEYWORDS: heritage; regeneration; housing; gentrification; representation; visual image

Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the ways in which we can understand heritage as an underlying theme in the development of policy relating to housing-led regeneration in the UK. I will discuss how the architectural design of homes created by this process of policy and image making are influenced by nods to heritage in ways that produce and reproduce particular social and cultural effects. The key contention proposed is that heritage-led narratives have the unintentional consequence of excluding non-dominant narratives, particularly those that are counter-cultural or non-economically or socially dominant.

As a way of exploring these ideas, this paper will set out the ways in which the idea of the “heritage asset” defines in a material and formal sense the type of heritage that is considered to be valuable and worthy of preservation by dominant groups. The foregrounding of particular types of building and related points in history, has, by default, the effect of side-lining heritages and uses of those operating outside of the dominant economic hegemony. The foregrounding of heritage in the process of regeneration therefore becomes a justification for the exclusion of groups and practices that do not conform to dominant economic and social narratives. I will use a case study, Hackney Wick Fish Island (HWFI), which is a de-industrialized area that forms part of the post-2012 London Olympics regeneration of East London. This case study will be located within an expanded timeline of previous and emerging housing-led regeneration projects located on de-industrialized sites, to briefly consider emerging patterns, and to consider how an underlying thread of heritage narratives contributes to a homogenizing of the contemporary housing landscape.

These ideas will be explored against the backdrop of my wider research, which examines ways in which the surfaces created and defined during the processes of regeneration relate to the commodification of different aspects of related cultural, historical, or social factors. My overall contention is that the formation of new developments in complex existing contexts results in a flattening of architectural, social, and cultural factors that reduce potential richness and complexity to a version of place, supported by a reliance on visual images.

Following an overview of where the case study sits within a lineage of similar housing-led regeneration, I will briefly examine the role that Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) plays in the formulation of distinct heritage-based narratives that underpin the policy and marketing narratives that drive these projects forward.¹ This will focus in on the New London Housing Vernacular,² both a document and a term to describe a particular style of brick-clad housing that is now the norm in London, before looking in detail at the delineation of the heritage asset. Following this, the role of authenticity as a parallel narrative is explored, in both form and

1 Much of my understanding of AHD is from reference to Emma Waterton, “Branding the Past: The Visual Imagery of England’s Heritage,” in *Culture, Heritage and Representation*, ed. Emma Waterton & Steve Watson (London: Ashgate, 2010).

2 David Birkbeck & Julian Hart, *A New London Housing Vernacular* (London: Urban Design London, 2012).

use, as a means to introduce and discuss the ways in which housing-led regeneration in de-industrialized areas can be said to foreground certain narratives while excluding others. Related to this is the notion of the visual being foregrounded in the consideration of heritage value.³

Background

As a broad introduction to housing-led regeneration, particularly in London, some key figures are useful. The 2012 London Olympics have been a catalyst for large-scale house building in East London, the site within which the Games were located. The London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), which controls the planning approach to the sections of four London boroughs that fall within their remit, is undertaking development work which aims to create 33,000 new homes by the time the LLDC disbands in 2026,⁴ along with educational and cultural centers to sit alongside the transport and retail infrastructure that was built to coincide with the Games themselves. The adjacent boroughs have also been able to piggy-back on the ongoing building boom around the Stratford site, leading to a number of new high density housing developments emerging in the context of older, low-density housing. As with any drive for redevelopment on such scale, there have been controversies as some users have been displaced or excluded by the increased cost of living, or more directly by the demolition of existing, tenanted, buildings, not only in the case study site but in the boroughs surrounding the Olympic site as a whole.⁵

I will set out here the idea that heritage narratives have been key in creating a linear, singular heritage-based approach that has encouraged large-scale regeneration whilst also influencing the materials and forms of newly developed buildings. This is particularly evident in Hackney Wick and Fish Island, which has a long industrial history and is now largely being turned over to housing. Within London, this process of replacing industrial land with housing is certainly not new. With a huge demand for homes, this intensive use of land within the metropolis is in no way a negative process when the demand for industrial land decreases, making use of existing infrastructure, and bolstering the cultural institutions of the Capital. What is relevant to this discussion is the role that heritage has played in the development of some of these areas, and how it continues to act as an underlying influence in the architectural design of these regeneration zones. Related specifically to Hackney Wick is the further strand of the way that visual media has helped combine the ideas of heritage and local cultural capital into a reductive version of place that is easily marketable. Expanding on the work of Crouch,⁶ this will be further addressed alongside authenticity.

One example is the redevelopment of the London Docklands in the 1980s and 1990s. Running between the City of London and Canary Wharf, there exists low-density development of terraced housing, small blocks of flats and their corresponding squares and public spaces. This is almost surprising in the contemporary context of high land values and a stark reminder of how much of this area had a far lower land value in recent memory. As is typical for London, the buildings are finished in brick, as a nod to the area's material context.⁷ This approach of

3 David Crouch, "The Perpetual Performance and Emergence of Heritage," in *Culture, Heritage and Representation*, ed. Emma Waterton & Steve Watson (London: Ashgate, 2010).

4 Will Ing, "Is the Olympic Park's redevelopment still on track?" *Architect's Journal*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/is-the-olympic-parks-redevelopment-still-on-track>.

5 There is extensive, detailed quantitative work relating to this. For this paper, I have referred to Isaac Marrero-Guillamon, "Expert Knowledge and Community Participation in Urban Planning: The Case of Post-Olympic Hackney Wick," in *Post Olympics City*, ed. Phil Cohen & Paul Watt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and Penny Bernstock & Paul Watt, "Legacy for Whom? Housing in Post-Olympic East London," in *Post Olympics City*, ed. Phil Cohen & Paul Watt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

6 David Crouch, "The Perpetual Performance and Emergence of Heritage," ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson, *Culture, Heritage and Representation* (London: Ashgate, 2010).

7 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 2012).

using materials that are already found within an area as references can be related to the 1967 Amenities Act which allowed planning authorities to designate “conservation” areas, which protect areas of townscape felt to be materially significant from a built-heritage perspective. Samuel describes how this led to planning departments mandating for “vernacular” regional styles in terms of material and form, which in some cases, led to the installation of “period” features, a process he refers to as townscapes being “systematically antiqued.”⁸

This selective protection can be understood within the parameters of Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), a term that is various and richly described by others, and of relevance here, as a means of reducing objects or places to aestheticized versions based on the tastes of a dominant middle class, white male perspective,⁹ and the idea of dominant narratives that focus on heritage relics as aesthetically pleasing objects valued for their national symbolic significance.¹⁰ In relation to my own subject area, architecture, this is relevant in the understanding of the role of the New London Housing Vernacular, both the name for the document setting this notion out, and the off-hand term to describe a certain type of contemporary brick-clad housing form.

New London Housing Vernacular

The term New London Housing Vernacular (NLHV) came into usage in architectural press and practice following the publication of an eponymous report in 2012 by London’s Deputy Mayor for Housing at the time, and other professional actors in built-environment activities. The report identifies a set of material and formal trends noted as being characteristic of the higher quality entries for the preceding Housing Design London Awards and the Brick Awards. The report authors frame this as a newfound restraint in design and detailing following the more bombastic designs of the pre-2008 financial crash, perhaps an example of the famous British “stiff-upper lip”:

“This extraordinary consensus around details and materials has prompted the term a ‘new London vernacular.’ Vernacular architecture is not chosen but dictated by the natural occurrence of materials suitable for construction, such as the beds of London clay that led to brickwork’s ubiquity. The new London vernacular is an intellectual, combining construction tradition and the capital’s most popular urban design, the Georgian, and sometimes Edwardian... It admits only a few outside influences, notably contemporary Dutch architecture’s love of sheer masonry that make buildings look extruded rather than built.”¹¹

While the NLHV introduction does not mention heritage per se, there is a strong suggestion in the above of a line being drawn between a particular period of London history and the associated construction techniques and materials evident in the Georgian terraces of London. Large windows, regular openings, minimal detail and brick facades are identified as some of the key elements¹² in the contemporary housing projects deemed successful for winning prizes in relevant award categories. This approach of focusing not only on a narrow period of history, but also on a select type of speculative housing from this period, puts some limitations on what is considered to be “vernacular” in this context. I argue that the NLHV functions as an AHD and that this generates dominant narratives that focus on heritage relics as aesthetically

8 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London; New York: Verso, 1994).

9 Zongjie Wu & Song Hou, “Heritage and Discourse,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

10 Michael Haldrup and Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt, “Heritage as Performance,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

11 Birkbeck & Hart, *A New London Housing Vernacular*, 9.

12 Ibid.

pleasing objects, valued for their national symbolic significance.¹³ In this context the selected “vernacular” comes from a similar type of origin myth that is necessary to establish the idea that this type of housing comes from a universal, natural set of principles.¹⁴

This set of principles relating to the vernacular is further defined by Rapoport as less the result of individual desire than of the aims of a unified group seeking the creation of an ideal environment,¹⁵ something which can certainly be stated as the driving force behind the speculative terrace housing of Georgian London, as much a social and economic unifier as an aesthetic one. Building on Bourdieu, both Dietler¹⁶ and Featherstone¹⁷ highlight the role that the consumption and knowledge of goods (both material and cultural) have in helping consumers to identify other like-minded individuals, and as Atkinson and Flint¹⁸ discuss in their work on gated communities, the desire to live near people of a similar social and cultural background comes not only from a perceived sense of safety and mutual understanding, but also from a fear of “day-to-day incivilities and random social contact.”¹⁹ Rapoport goes further, highlighting the role that housing and houses play as physical devices that perpetuate hegemony, with housing forming a “silent language,” acting as a form of social control.²⁰ Returning to Samuel and his close reading of the material fabric of London regeneration, it is clear that there is a relationship between the idea of a vernacular for London, based on brick as a material, and terraces as a form, which he terms as follows:

“Neo-vernacular brickwork, in short, has some claim to being the international style of our times, even though it taps sentiments which are regional and claim to be indigenous.”²¹

The idea that the “neo-vernacular brickwork” claims to be indigenous is key here. Underlying the heritage narratives that form much of the rationale of housing-led regeneration in de-industrialized pockets of London is the insinuation, functioning in the same manner as an AHD, that new developments are simple repairs to the urban fabric, with the removal of aberrative but relatively contemporary building becoming an essential part of this process of renewal. The identification of aberrative fabric leads us to the identification of buildings and places that can be considered to support a specific notion of place. While the statutory process of listing buildings of specific historic or material significance is one method, there is a further device in the form of the “heritage asset” – a non-statutory identification that can be carried out by local authorities.

Heritage Asset

Heritage asset is a term that is used across UK planning policy and design guidance documents to describe a material or cultural entity, such as a building, park or market, that offers a perceived social value. It is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as:

“A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.

13 Bærenholdt & Haldrup, “Heritage as Performance,” 8.

14 Alan Colquhoun, *Modernity and the classical tradition: architectural essays 1980-1987* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

15 Amos Rapoport, *House, form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs (N.J.); Hemel Hempstead: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 47.

16 Michael Dietler, “Consumption,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

17 Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (Los Angeles, Cal.; London: Sage, 2007).

18 Rowland Atkinson and John Flint, “Fortress UK? Gated Communities, the Spatial Revolt of Elites and Time-Space Trajectories of Segregation,” *Housing Studies* 19, 6 (November 2004).

19 Atkinson and Flint, “Fortress UK?”, 880.

20 Rapoport, *House, Form and Culture*, 49.

21 Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 131.

It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).²²

It is important to note that “designated heritage assets” are those such as world heritage sites and scheduled monuments, i.e., sites with international or national significance. Heritage assets are defined at a more local level and are not necessarily covered by precise definition. The term “heritage interest” is not defined, and as such, I would argue that discussion around what constitutes a heritage asset is open to some interpretation. This looseness has many potential benefits as it can help protect irreplaceable community, historic and local assets from tabula rasa development, and allows their attribution of value to the local area to be made on the grounds of their current use. However, the control of the narrative is important to understand, and arguably, the idea of the heritage asset is one that derives directly from AHD, as in a similar fashion to an AHD, the assets are typically identified by experts on behalf of the public.²³

Defining the heritage asset

While we can get a vague sense of what might be determined to be a heritage asset, it is pertinent to discuss what is excluded from this identification. There is a sense that old is automatically “good,” with older material being a non-renewable resource, and therefore, protected due to its relative scarcity.²⁴ Related to the relative scarcity of older fabric is a sense of prestige “where oldness is all and class discrimination, retrospectively at least, irrelevant.”²⁵ Samuel highlights here the reductive narratives that focus on the material, at the exclusion of social and cultural factors. As Pétursdóttir goes on to note, it is not simply age that allows a structure or place to be determined a heritage asset, it must also exist in a particular way:

“Properly old, ready-ruined, sanitary and trouble-free, it provides visitors with a disciplined and purified space without extraneous materials, plants, fauna, debris and modern intrusions.”²⁶

While in this case it is ruins being referred to, we can apply a similar approach to the heritage asset, with older buildings “now prized as living links to the past,”²⁷ where once they may have been considered a hindrance and of low value. These are not inherently valuable, they only become so when they can reinforce particular narratives. This is further emphasized by Samuel in his discussion of a relatively recent preference for older industrial buildings to be redeveloped into housing:

“By a strange alchemy of taste, the present age has come to admire precisely those features of the built environment which in their own time were neglected or despised. The warehouses, today blossoming out as luxury apartments and penthouses, were a byword for drudgery and dirt in early Victorian England.”²⁸

In the case of Hackney Wick, the local area has a range of existing buildings and structures, some of which are identified as heritage assets in the LLDC’s 2014 *Conservation Area Appraisal* and earlier advisory reports that pre-date the related design guidance. These reports reflect a balanced and nuanced identification of value, noting that some buildings are of low historic value, but offer aesthetic and townscape contributions, or as in the case of one of the few post-war buildings identified, contemporary cultural functions in the form of a theatre and gallery space.²⁹ The application of the term within the 2018 Adopted Supplementary Planning

22 MHCLG, *National Planning Policy Framework* (London: HMSO, 2019), 64.

23 Waterton, “Branding the Past,” 167.

24 Pora Pétursdóttir “Concrete Matters: Ruins of modernity and this called heritage,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 31, no. 1 (2012): 34.

25 Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 129.

26 Pétursdóttir “Concrete Matters,” 37.

27 Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 39.

28 *Ibid.*, 129.

29 Tibbalds, “Hackney Wick Conservation Area Other Relevant Heritage Assets: Non-Designated Heritage Assets,” 2016, 19.



Fig. 1: An existing four storey corner building, with various brick details, and three storey adjoining block (April 2021).

Fig. 2: Existing building with exposed concrete frame and brick infill (January 2020).

Guidance, which is the document aimed at developers and their design teams to aid with the compliance of their designs with the local authority's aspirations, loses some of this nuance, and the application of the term "heritage asset" becomes binary and is used to refer to three to four storey, mid-nineteenth century structures. Those buildings identified as heritage assets in the design guidance are generally the larger, Victorian brick-built clusters of warehouse buildings and are typically three or four storeys in height, with large, regular openings, brick facades, and form perimeter blocks, with associated yards.

Contrary to some of the more contemporary buildings, that are not identified as heritage assets, the chosen few are relatively ornate, with polychromatic brickwork, and recessed brick panels used to give definition to the large expanses of façade (see Fig. 1 & 2). These buildings are noted as being suitable references for future development in terms of material and formal arrangement, and it is clear that some of these material references have been taken directly. The new additions to the area borrow from the identified heritage assets in their surface modulation and different brick colors, creating vertical emphasis, and detail around entrances. Some new buildings also use the motifs of exposed concrete frames or lintels. It is also clear that the height of these heritage assets is used as a minimum guideline, which reflects the commercial imperatives driving these projects. Also shown in Fig. 1, the existing step down in height from the corner is met by a new construction that matches the height of the existing corner building. The restrained expression of the new buildings, and their solid forms, suggests a seriousness to the new architectural proposals in line with the aims of the NLHV. It is the direct adjacency of these new buildings to their relatively diminutive older neighbors that is the clearest of the value of heritage as a theme, which we might term heritage-washing after art-washing, or green-washing. We can understand how the aspects of the existing context that can be applied to high-density residential architecture have been applied in material and plan forms in the consideration of the new buildings. However, as with the material selections, the chosen context is specific and limited to relatively tall groups of existing buildings, and not the relatively low post-war construction, with lower buildings of low heritage value being replaced with new construction that conforms to the new minimum guidance of four to six storeys (see Fig. 3). It appears that the former maximum height has become a minimum.



Fig. 3: Images from January 2020 and September 2021 of the same street, showing the new scale.

Fig. 4: Example of the low-rise, poor-quality development to be removed and replaced (January 2020, now demolished).

Buildings excluded from this definition are the smaller in scale, and often more recently completed. Some of these are brick, and many date from the 1950s onwards. These buildings are specifically highlighted in the LLDC's guidance as being of low value, with long unbroken facades, and "low quality contemporary brickwork"³⁰ (for example, Fig. 4). Not only are these excluded from the "heritage asset" definition, their material and formal compositions are noted as unsuitable for future developments. These lower buildings are light industrial units, some of which have active uses, and others have been converted into relatively low cost live/work studio spaces by collective groups.³¹ They are relatively low lying, and leave large areas of the site free for external yards.

These formal considerations are important, as in order to achieve the 4,400 homes set out in the masterplan for the area,³² the low-density models offered by the contemporary light industrial units offer a far too low-density model for development at this scale. The older buildings, blocks of around four storeys, offer a much denser typology. That these buildings can also be directly related to an industrial heyday, at the height of the Victorian Empire, where innovative products such as vulcanized rubber³³ were developed, allows for a narrative to be created that foregrounds the historic, material and cultural value of the older building stock over the more recently constructed buildings and their associated uses. This thread of innovation is picked up in the design of the newly redeveloped Overground station, which uses motifs inspired by chemistry to highlight a link to a type of building use that has long since disappeared from the area. The contemporary light industrial uses (much of which is being relocated within the wider site) such as scaffolding yards and fridge repairers do not give the same romantic vision as

30 London Legacy Development Corporation, *Hackney Wick & Fish Island Design and Planning Guidance* (London: LLDC, 2014), 43.

31 Further, detailed explorations have been carried out by: Isaac Marrero-Guillamon, "Expert Knowledge and Community Participation in Urban Planning: the Case of Post-Olympic Hackney Wick," in *Post Olympics City*, ed. Phil Cohen & Paul Watt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and Richard Brown, *Creative Factories: Hackney Wick and Fish Island* (London: LLDC, 2013).

32 London Legacy Development Corporation, *Hackney Wick & Fish Island Supplementary Planning Guidance* (London: LLDC, 2018), 11.

33 Brown, *Creative Factories*, 12

the idea of the Victorian innovator. This attitude of reifying the distant past is related to what Zukin refers to as a sense of authenticity that is achieved only through a selective vision of the distant past, and not a wider vision inclusive of the immediate past.³⁴

This distance is important, not only as it frees us from immediate controversy, such as the eviction of the artists that made HWFI appealing to potential residents in the first place, but because it also relates to the processes of nostalgia. As Boym highlights, the stronger the rhetoric of continuity, the more selectively the past is presented.³⁵ In order for us to understand the contemporary importance of the identified heritage assets, we are encouraged to see their former uses as directly materially and culturally relevant to the site as it currently stands. I believe that Boym would term the current practice in Hackney Wick as “restorative nostalgia” – an active recreation of an imagined past.³⁶ We can continue this line of thought by returning to Samuel and the idea of “traditional” building types (he refers to housing) being simultaneously antiqued and modernized.

Samuel describes the ways in which conservation areas, which are designated by local authority planning departments, are reactive processes in that the appraisal tends to be made once an area has begun to experience the forces of gentrification. He uses this to reinforce what he sees as their primary function:

“There is nothing ‘historic’ in any archaeological sense about many of the districts, or enclaves, now designated conservation areas. What marks them out is the class of people which has moved into them, and the idiom of their ambition. Conservation is the currency with which they deal, in upgrading their houses and themselves. It turns the humblest dwelling into a period residence; façades into ‘historic’ fabrics.”³⁷

From this, we can understand that the formalized processes of heritage and conservation, which seek to retain increasingly scarce fabric, have the further consequence of a reductive approach to the ownership and remodeling of these areas. This protection of certain built elements to the detriment of others, and the guidance towards the same typologies as new models for housing, can be said to reinforce one, singular voice in terms of narrative. This sits contrary to other types of conservation and heritage practices, as described by Pendlebury and the notion of “assemblage” which takes the idea of understanding building, users and place as a “non-static social entity”³⁸ that can be accommodated in planning policy and nurtured, in contravention of the top-down practice of AHD.

De-industrialized Redevelopment and Marketing

In the case of housing-led regeneration in de-industrialized areas, we can describe the means by which the NLHV applies to both the form and material of new residential developments. We can also describe the way that industrial heritage is weaved into ideas of a residential vernacular, creating an aestheticized warehouse-ish building style. This is where AHD and the NLHV intersect. The AHD sets out that developments will be partly defined by a cherry-picking of aestheticized industrial relics, excised from their uses and contexts, alongside new buildings that bridge the gap between a version of the London Georgian terrace, and warehouse-ish blocks of flats. The upshot in terms of development are brick-faced buildings that reference

34 Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: the death and life of authentic urban places* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 70.

35 Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and its Discontents,” *The Hedgehog Review* 9, 2 (Summer 2007), <https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-uses-of-the-past/articles/nostalgia-and-its-discontents>.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 128.

38 John Pendlebury, “Conservation Values, the Authorised Heritage Discourse and the Conservation-Planning Assemblage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, 7 (2013): 710.

both a sanitized industrial past and a type of residential architecture that Hatherley highlights is substantially self-perpetuating due to its relative ease of sale.³⁹ In this way, the NLHV is an AHD, pushing a vision of heritage that is at once apparently common sense and apparently neutral.⁴⁰ The document makes clear that we are to understand the return to a sensible, rational, pared-down architecture as a return to natural aesthetic preference, a preference which as with any AHD, is supported by dominant white, middle-class values.⁴¹ The imagery presented in the NLHV document, and the heritage and character area statements that form the basis of planning guidance for regeneration areas, then becomes self-perpetuating, with the images supporting the development work helping to reinforce the image of place as it is being created.

I would argue that this process is similar to Baudrillard's description of the effect of an event and its media being formed at the same time – the historical dimension, or perspective is lost when the images and source work as a feedback loop.⁴² Voase expands on this by setting out Baudrillard's hypothesis for four possible stages of the image, and the increasingly levels of intensity in the simulations they portray.⁴³ Of the four levels, the most relevant to us is the phase four image: a representation of a reality that supersedes (or precedes) the original.⁴⁴ In Baudrillard's terms, this is the map that defines the territory it describes⁴⁵ – the documents setting out historical and contemporary material value apparently aim to reflect what is currently present, but in fact define a version, or assemblage of elements and periods in time that does not currently exist, or had not existed simultaneously prior to its definition in these documents.

We can continue this idea of the image as a representation that supersedes the original with a more focused view on heritage and marketing, and to consider how an assemblage of elements can be presented as a cohesive product. Starting with heritage, Crouch addresses this in arguing that heritage is essentialized by advertising and that the foregrounding of the visual as the means of representation can be a reductive process.⁴⁶ Crouch further argues that representation in a commercial context gives an image a fixed status, for example when it is taken out of context.⁴⁷ The authority of the visual over approaches to cultural representation that include other methods is highlighted by Waterton:

“In other words, visual imagery does more than provide a pictorial “label” for heritage: it creates, promotes and preserves a particular version of heritage as reality.”⁴⁸

Waterton expands on this by highlighting that the visual can constitute and sustain powerful asymmetries within sociocultural structures and, further, that visual imagery plays a key role in both sustaining and constructing the values and narratives that they seek to represent.⁴⁹

The promotion and reproduction of a particular version is addressed by du Gay in his rendering of “lifestyling” which he identifies as the combination of design and visual communication with the techniques of market segmentation,⁵⁰ which seeks to identify specific target markets and

39 Owen Hatherley, *Ministry of Nostalgia* (London: Verso, 2016), 184.

40 Waterton, “Branding the Past,” 159.

41 Hou and Wu, “Heritage Discourse,” 41.

42 Jean Baudrillard, *Screened Out* (London: Verso, 2014), 192.

43 Richard Voase, “Visualizing the Past: Baudrillard, Intensities of the Hyper-real and the Erosion of Historicity,” *Culture, Heritage and Representation*, ed. Emma Waterton & Steve Watson (London: Ashgate, 2010), 105.

44 *Ibid.*, 109.

45 *Ibid.*, 116.

46 Crouch, “The Perpetual Performance and Emergence of Heritage,” 59.

47 *Ibid.*, 61.

48 Waterton, “Branding the Past,” 156.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Paul du Gay, *Consumption and Identity at Work* (London: Sage, 1996), 100.



Fig. 5(a,b): Some of the different housing styles of St Katherine's Dock, photographed in July 2020.

aim products towards them.⁵¹ In the consideration of exclusion, du Gay goes on to highlight that for those not included in a target market, the effect is one of marginalization:

“In a market-dependent consumer culture, those whose consumption does not matter much for the successful reproduction of capital are virtually non-people.”⁵²

In terms of considering the scale of housing as a product, the effects of focusing on a relatively narrow market, i.e., those that can afford to live in a new housing development, sets very clear parameters regarding who the spaces are designed to accommodate. This is described directly by Zukin when she refers to the “crystallization of place into product,”⁵³ which may be where AHD meets marketing discourse. This is further reinforced when we consider the effects of privileging the visual as described by Crouch, where the visual image is given a fixed status when used in a commercial setting.

I would argue that this fixed status is what allows other themes to be applied in the marketing of a place. In her study of the images and material used to market “English” heritage locations as destinations for tourist visits, Waterton highlights that in much of the imagery used, and in the accompanying text descriptions, the focus of what constitutes “heritage” is on the “structurally visible sites,”⁵⁴ and not the user, the visitor, or the wider culturally complex intersections within which the sites are located. Waterton is explicit in her reading of the material used to market “English” days out as being exclusive of the people that might visit and their relationship to “Englishness.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, as an AHD approach is applied, the tightly controlled, people-free imagery used to market these destinations is reflective of the tightly controlled, expert driven management of what heritage is and is not.⁵⁶ If this is applied to a de-industrialized area, such as the current (HWFI) regeneration, and earlier projects such as the London Docklands, we can see parallels to the AHD approach taken to market specific visions of English heritage in the marketing and policy material for these areas. In Fig. 5, we can see

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Zukin, *Naked City*, 46.

54 Waterton, “Branding the Past,” 169.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

how St Katherine's Dock, a former dock redeveloped in the 1980s and 1990s, blends together different versions of British architecture.

In the case of HWFI, many of the former industrial units have become artist studios and cheap residential accommodation, following a general London trend of an artist-led process of gentrification moving east across the city. This is described retrospectively by Stallabrass, who describes the use in the 1990s of former industrial spaces in the London Docklands by "art-world types"⁵⁷ to display work as a novelty for the people going to view the art. He describes this placement of artworks in de-industrialized settings as an act of "apparent openness but actual exclusivity"⁵⁸ – it is located here not to widen the audience for the work, but as a response to the excitement of people visiting these types of industrial spaces for the first time. The novelty is related to an elitism on the part of the intended audience.⁵⁹ This is further developed by Harris in his reading of another East London site, Hoxton, which sits just to the north of Shoreditch. Harris uses the idea of the "urban pastoral" (attributed to Stallabrass) which follows the idea of the rural pastoral fantasy, but replaces the rural poor with the urban working class.⁶⁰ In a similar way to how Macarthur⁶¹ describes the picturesque as a means of detached, aesthetic appropriation by an elite viewer, the urban pastoral in terms of this part of East London took the form of a cultural appropriation of both the working-class residents that lived in the area, and the artistic and creative culture that had built up to take advantage of the cheaper rents. The area was marketed by local authorities and developers as a place with "creative buzz"⁶² that businesses locating to the area could take advantage of. Harris terms this use of the artist-led culture as a type of cultural appropriation, in terms of both the appropriation of creative culture and also of the area's appearance being characterized by deprivation. Urban pastoral then relates to an aesthetic exploitation of the area's material degradation⁶³ and to the "buzz" generated by the artist studios. Both are to be offered by developers and landowners for consumption by new, wealthier incomers.

Combined with this appropriation of creative culture, Sharon Zukin highlights that aspects of gentrification also relate to the aestheticizing of an area's perceived material deprivation, such as the protection of graffiti and exposed concrete. She terms this the "riskless risk," where a place may offer the impression of being a place where the visitor is at risk, while actually being very safe.⁶⁴ Here, we can see how ideas linked to AHD relate to gentrification. If AHD relies on the aestheticization of selected material elements in order to reproduce a dominant vision of heritage,⁶⁵ and further, is based on the possession of heritage as being placed outside of the wider public⁶⁶ we can see that the type of heritage being appropriated in areas where only selected cultural and material artefacts are considered to be of value is a form of AHD. In areas such as Shoreditch, and now HWFI, a selective material culture is applied alongside a selective cultural appropriation of each area, foregrounding the tried-and-tested approach of following artist-led gentrification with lots of new, expensive housing (see also the London Docklands, and Manhattan's SoHo). As much as Hatherley highlights that materially, the market chose brick because it knows it to be successful,⁶⁷ it can also be argued that the market chose artist-led regeneration for the same reasons.

57 Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: the rise and fall of young British art* (London: Verso, 2006), 50.

58 *Ibid.*, 52.

59 *Ibid.*, 50.

60 Andrew Harris, "Art and Gentrification: pursuing the urban pastoral in Hoxton, London" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, 2 (2012), 230.

61 John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: architecture, disgust and other irregularities* (London: Routledge, 2007).

62 Harris, "Art and Gentrification," 233.

63 *Ibid.*

64 Zukin, *Naked City*, 17.

65 Waterton, "Branding the Past," 159.

66 *Ibid.*, 167.

67 Hatherley, *Ministry of Nostalgia*, 184.



Fig. 6: Retained chimney in HWFI (April 2021).

Fig. 7: Retained crane in the Royal Docks (Oct 2020).

Authenticity in Defining Narratives

The idea of authenticity as a means of justifying the preferential protection and development types over others is not a new one, and is introduced only briefly here following the work of Zukin (1986, 2010) and others. It is also relevant to consider the role that authenticity plays in heritage discourses relating to tourism, as described by Urry (1990) and Silverman (2015). Silverman describes how the idea of authenticity relates to a potentially damaging perpetuation of practices that could cause harm to an existing community by the expectation that these practices are upheld,⁶⁸ and further, that this expectation of a version of authenticity will be received differently by different users – a visitor might see this as authentic, while the host may be more aware of the construction of the narrative (ibid). While this refers to cultural practices, this is also something that can be related to practices of building conservation, such as requirements for the surroundings of monuments to be made picturesque by the removal of the visible odds and ends of modern life. In this sense, the authenticity of the monument relies on the inauthenticity of the surroundings.⁶⁹ This is further described by Voase, who discusses the pursuit of the authentic as a paradox as the proliferation of images and media leads to a demand for images and media.⁷⁰ Here, we can return to Baudrillard's level four image – the image that is a representation of reality precedes or succeeds the original.⁷¹ He goes on to highlight that the aim of these visual images relates to the authenticity of the viewer's engagement, rather than

68 Helaine Silverman, "Authenticity and Heritage," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 76.

69 Ibid. 72.

70 Voase, "Visualizing the Past," 119.

71 Ibid., 110.

claims to authenticity of the object.⁷² This is particularly relevant when heritage, and indeed other cultural products, are applied as an assemblage of elements – it is the user's engagement with that image that will further reproduce the implied narrative.

In the case of Hackney Wick, the idea of the authentic is explicitly addressed in the planning guidance, which notes that “Hackney Wick's authenticity must be safe-guarded.”⁷³ This “authenticity” is only loosely defined, relating in part to “beneficial uses” (beneficiaries not stated) and carefully chosen material objects – the heritage assets.⁷⁴ The objects to be preserved are not monuments in the sense of international importance, but are identified largely due to their industrial heritage, sanitized and aestheticized, and more importantly for residential areas, silenced. HWFI has a chimney (Fig. 6), isolated from a factory that has long since been demolished, a pub, one listed boundary wall and several large scale Victorian industrial buildings. The London Royal Docks retains some of the loading cranes by the docks (Fig. 7), and the railway tracks denote footpaths, similarly in the Docklands. In the case of Hackney Wick, the desire to make a more authentic, or more aesthetically pleasing, context to the retained heritage assets is made explicit in the 2018 design guide which states that new buildings, to be between four six storeys, “should not compete with, or detract from, retained heritage assets,”⁷⁵ or in other words, should form a new background for the heritage assets.

The idea of re-making the context of the “heritage assets” can be related to Silverman's highlighting that authenticity, however it can be measured, is not a stable value, but is something that should be understood as dynamic, performative and culturally and historically contingent:

“a quality/tool that can be strategically configured and deployed according to the task at hand, be that social, cultural, economic, political, religious and so on.”⁷⁶

Authenticity as a reflexive tool is important in the consideration of the city and the changing needs that it presents, and sits counter to the AHD ideas that rest behind conservation practice. Authenticity is also a thread in the marketing material for one of the developments in Hackney Wick (the word displayed over commissioned artworks on site hoardings and in marketing brochures, see Fig. 8). In theory, this idea of authenticity potentially opens up narratives that run counter to the monological AHD approach⁷⁷. This is something that Pétursdóttir describes in her 2012 article that uses the ruined Icelandic herring factories as a means to discuss intangible heritage, and the related issues that arise when different users of a place (visitors, tourists, photographers, owners) see the buildings in a different way.⁷⁸ The processes behind the static narrative, referred to by Urry as to “museumify” – a process of preventing new development in order to preserve the advantages of those that are already there⁷⁹ are evident in HWFI. The area did formally have housing directly adjacent to the factories and warehouse buildings that are now considered to be heritage assets. None of this housing remains, thanks in part to damage sustained in the Second World War. What we can see is that the existing street pattern is visible, and where we now have yards that are being developed into perimeter block style housing, there once was tight, low level terraced housing.

Taking forward Urry's idea of museumification, we can add a further strand to the weaving of narrative into the regeneration of Hackney Wick. As we have seen, it is not enough for built heritage to exist to be considered valuable, it must exist in a particular way.⁸⁰ In our case

72 Ibid.

73 LLDC, *Hackney Wick & Fish Island Design and Planning Guidance*, 3.

74 Ibid., 67.

75 LLDC, *Hackney Wick & Fish Island Supplementary Planning Guidance*, 33.

76 Silverman, “Authenticity and Heritage,” 69.

77 Waterton, “Branding the Past,” 159.

78 Pétursdóttir, “Concrete Ruins.”

79 John Urry, *The tourist gaze: leisure and travel in contemporary societies* (London: Sage, 1990), 113.

80 Pétursdóttir, “Concrete Ruins,” 37.



Fig. 8: Hoarding showing graffiti-inspired graphics, opposite a graffiti covered wall (Jan 2020).

study of HWFI, the walls of the heritage assets identified in the LLDC's guidance are often covered in graffiti, a practice for which the area has become known. This is also replicated on the advertising hoardings that surround the building sites. One of the area's best-known landmarks, the Lord Napier pub, is topped with the painted phrase "Shithouse to Penthouse," added to the building as part of the Hackney WickED festival in 2012 (Fig. 9), and has become the site of many an Instagrammable moment for people heading to the area's bars. Much of the area is covered in artwork, and it is this type of decorated brickwork that has become the secondary thread in the situation of new building work in the area. While the factory remnants and brick-clad blocks deal with the material heritage, the politicized work (often protesting against gentrification) is reduced to a surface motif for marketing material, appearing alongside photographs in brochures, and also in sanitized forms on the cladding for the emerging new buildings. As the redevelopment progresses, and the surfaces available to artists reduce, what remains is the commissioned work on some of the commercial buildings, and the promise that some parts, such as the Lord Napier itself, will become a canvas for local artists⁸¹ that are invited to contribute work. It would appear that, in line with Zukin's "riskless risk," carefully selected and sanitized "graffiti-style" elements will remain.

We might then say that the re-building of the area's industrial plots with new housing is a reimagining of the relationship of industrial built fabric with residential uses, and a parallel appropriation of the area's artistic culture in order to appeal to what we could term as a more "culturally literate" demographic. The formal relationships are acutely different. The retained chimney is diminutive when compared to the new buildings that sit adjacent to and taller than it. Similarly, we have already seen that the new buildings will sit at a similar height to what were formally the most prominent buildings in the area. What has been constructed therefore is something in between a reconstructed version of a past landscape that never existed in this form, and a landscape dictated by the demands of the market. The balance of this sits between the developer and landowners' requirement for density in order to profit, and the

81 Anna Lezard, "150 years of the Lord Napier: from boozer to rave squat to artist mecca," Roman Road London, 18 November 2019: <https://romanroadlondon.com/lord-napier-pub-hackney-wick-history/>.



Fig. 9: The Lord Napier pub, under redevelopment (July 2020).
 Fig. 10: One of the new streets in HWFI. (Sept. 2020).

potential residents desire for something reassuringly familiar. The desire for familiarity can be related to Boym's definition of nostalgia as a "longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed,"⁸² and we can understand and see this in the materials and forms shaping new HWFI development. The use of "heritage" as a design and marketing hook balances material familiarity (brick), formal consistency (blocks forming streets with tall, defined edges) and a sense of continuity in material form by a simple adjacency to existing blocks. I would argue that this practice of the retention of aestheticized fragments of heritage is directly related to this construction of a past that has never existed.

This is referred to by Baudrillard as the process of acculturation, becoming a blending of cultures and objects, which are no longer simply signs or commodities, but are simply verifications of the code (the code being the requirements of capitalist production and consumption).⁸³ This tactical blending of the old and the new can also be held up to Baudrillard's continuation of this idea, the hypermarket.⁸⁴ As a homogeneous space without mediation, such as we see in Fig. 10, we lose the variation of height, form and material that would give the heritage assets their prominence. We might also relate this to a "decontextualization of tradition,"⁸⁵ where objects identified as heritage appear as quotations to a version of the past. This idea can further be attributed to the previously noted NLHV, a stylistic guide that has seen the buildings represented in the document reproduced across numerous developments around London. Not only is the style and form homogeneous within Hackney Wick, the new buildings also represent a style of housing recognizable to buyers. This becomes relevant in the discussion of housing and regeneration when we consider the practices of heritage – the identification of assets and the selective protection of material structures - and the places where these practices sit parallel to the commercially driven practices of housing marketing and sale.

82 Boym, "Nostalgia and its Discontents."

83 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 75.

84 *Ibid.*

85 Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 65.

Conclusion

We have understood that the role of the heritage asset is key to the derivation of narrative around retention and exclusion in regeneration areas, particularly in this reading of the case study site of HWFI. This definition allows for the exclusion of lower density building types, and of the uses that these enclose, while opening up a proposition that the existing heritage assets need to be protected not only in their current form, but also in how they are viewed. The re-making of context using the new and denser form of the warehouse-ish housing block, under the guise of repair and preservation, enables dense new development to replace areas of low density. While this is efficient for the developers, and in the case of Hackney Wick, helps the local authorities and the LLDC meet their housing targets, there is the ongoing risk that the contemporary culture that might be termed the “authentic character” that draws potential residents to the area will be lost. As the development continues, the prominence of the retained “heritage assets” will similarly be lost as the buildings in the surrounding streets rise up to meet these buildings of historical note.

The aim of this paper has not been to set out an anti-development stance, as cities must adapt to meet the needs of their occupants, which certainly includes the construction of new housing, neither has it been to reduce the complexities of regeneration and complexities to these particular observations of one case study site. However, the narratives used to underpin contemporary housing development can employ narratives that exclude non-dominant voices. We have understood that there are various strands through which heritage plays out in terms of design guidance and policy, with the NLHV defining the dominant form for new housing projects, particularly in London. We have understood the relationship of this definition to the practices of conservation, and the role of the singular, authoritative voice as defined by AHD. Looking at the regeneration of de-industrialized areas more broadly, we have seen that heritage played an important role in setting out the aesthetic aspirations of a new development, and how the current uses of de-industrialized areas, particularly those related to forms of creative endeavor, open the areas up to redevelopment that seek to capitalize on the concurrent themes of artistic creativity, and aestheticized industrial heritage.

In terms of architectural design, we can look to the practices identified in the NLHV and in the heritage statements that accompany local planning policy to get a sense of what regeneration areas might look like prior to their completion. As well as a cultural homogeneity, the practices of heritage-led redevelopment that require new buildings to form the background to selected buildings of heritage value, acts to create a placelessness where the same building forms are employed to fill whichever role is required of them. As Waterton and Crouch describe, the privileging of the visual image risks the obfuscation of more complex narratives, and that the images produced in support of one narrative (an AHD) only reproduce and reinforce that specific voice. We have also understood from Pétursdóttir the importance of heritage objects existing in a specific way that reinforces the roles asked of them, and in examining the parallel roles of heritage and culture in HWFI, have understood the role that the visual image plays in assimilating and reducing complex and potentially paradoxical narratives into a singular voice that supports the aims of the economically dominant actors. Crucially, as Pendlebury describes, there is much potential richness to be gained if the narratives are loosened and the practices of “assemblage” are employed, that might encourage different users, places and practices to be given equal weighting in redevelopment, alongside the dominant practices of heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With thanks to Professor Adam Sharr and Doctor Samuel Austin for their continued support and guidance, to Kieran Connolly for his advice, and to the reviewers for their generous engagement with this article.

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