

BEYOND PRESENTISM

Heritage and the Temporality of Things

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Heritage is often seen as a symptom of a temporally disjointed and all-pervasive present which shapes the pasts it requires to make up for the failures of linear, modern and progressive history. As a consequence, the pasts in heritage are often regarded as the result of unidirectional processes of attributing value to largely compliant materials. This article explores the constitutive role of materials in different stages of heritage-making and stress the specific material memory of buildings as central in the negotiation of temporalities in conservation practice. The notion of material memory allows for a closer consideration of both the unsolicited material effects of past events that is part of the historical fabric of buildings, as well as their ongoing transformation exceeding any one unitary and neatly contained historical present.

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The understanding of heritage as a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon reflecting a specific order of time has been central in historical explanations for contemporary society's growing popular interest in the past. In the work of French historian François Hartog (2015), one of the arguments is that the rise of heritage since the 1970s, reflects broader social and economic shifts in Europe. Hartog develops the notion of "presentism" as a new regime of historicity, or a distinct way of understanding and being in time, which sustains the comprehensive concern with memory and heritage in our time. In the regime of presentism, history no longer serves authoritatively as life's teacher, and the future has lost its directional thrust as the structuring device of historical teleology. The present is deprived of the future from which it once received its sense of purpose, according to the histo-

rian Harry Harootunian (2007: 472). The economic, environmental, and social insecurities of our age imply that the future is no longer perceived as a bright horizon, but instead constitutes an "imminent threat" (Hartog 2015: 16). In this crisis of historical time, the present is seen as all-encompassing: "We cannot see beyond it. Since it has neither a past nor a future, this present daily fabricates the past and future it requires, while privileging the immediate" (Hartog 2015: 113).

It is also against a similar backdrop that the "socio-psychological paradigm" influenced heritage studies in the 1980s and 1990s (Gentry & Smith 2019). Like the canary dying in the coal mine, heritage was often treated as a sign of a more general malaise. The popular interest in heritage was pathologized as an obsession; a projection screen for melancholy and a

profound unease in the collective psyche. Heritage grew proportionally with the loss of faith in the future, and was often tied to economic decline in the final third of the twentieth century (Hewison 1987; Nora 2002). A notion of the forward march of history was sustained by three decades of economic growth in Western Europe after the Second World War, when historical rupture could still be credibly thought of as a precondition for progress.

The crisis of linear, historical time, jams the present between ersatz memory, between a tradition “[...] from which we would be forever separated [...]” (Nora 2002: 5), and a future which is “[...] reintroduced negatively, through our concern with preservation” (Hartog in Tamm & Olivier 2019: 14). It is the alleged, omnipresent and temporally unmoored present, which yields the predominant concern with commemoration and preservation. It is the present that extends into the past, and not the other way around (Hartog 2015: 201). Heritage is primarily a symptom of the prevailing social temporality, given that “heritage makes visible and expresses a certain order of time” (Hartog 2015: 152). Heritage is dictat-

ed by the needs of the present (Burch 2005: 212–213) and, at the end of the day, it has “very little to do with the past” (Harrison 2015: 35).

Heritage-making and its Materials

Over the following pages, I will approach these assumptions from the ground up, through an exploration of the role played by materials in the production of specific temporalities or orders of time in heritage. I suggest that things do hold, and are shaped by, material memories that affect their trajectories into the heritage domain. Historical ruptures are interlaced with a massive continuity in the material world (Glassie 2003), which is perhaps a fundamental driving force of historic preservation to begin with. The present of things past is treated in the following as a form which evolves and yet persists as a material memory, understood as “what becomes of what was” (Witmore 2014: 209). For while heritage objects are often understood collectively as semiophores, “visible objects endowed with meaning” (Hartog 2015: 152), and material indexes of the current social temporality, I want to highlight their



Figure 1: The house in Olderfjord prior to dismantling. May 2016. (Photo: Torgeir Rinke Bangstad)

specific contribution in the presenting of the past, which involves material contingency and agencies that exceed deliberate human fabrication and attribution of meaning. This is central to my case study as it extends the notion of “heritage production” to the materials themselves. Material properties of heritage objects delimit the range of representations which may credibly be bestowed upon a given object. In the following account, practices of ascribing meaning, significance, and value are refracted through the performativity of objects, their specific affordances and properties which also impose certain constraints on heritage practice in the present.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Finnmark, the northernmost county of Norway, in 2016, and at Norsk Folkemuseum, the open-air museum at the Bygdøy peninsula in Oslo, in 2018, the aim of the article is to investigate how different temporalities are envisioned and enacted in museum practice, with regard to the specific limitations and potentials of the material at hand.¹ I explore the case of an abandoned building from Olderfjord in Finnmark, which was acquired by Norsk Folkemuseum to be preserved *ex situ* at the open-air museum in Oslo. More specifically, the case study is an exploration of what things do *in*, and *to* heritage practice, and an investigation of how specific material memories might engender specific practices and modes of engagement in the field. Rather than seeing heritage objects *in spe*, like the Olderfjord house in the present study, as reflections of one specific relation to time from which it derives its meaning and purpose, the following case study explores processes of translating the complex architectural compound of different times, durations, and material rhythms into a more stable, legible, and coherent expression of *one* time; a “timely” heritage object (Bangstad 2019b).

Here, heritage-making involves a form of negotiation with the material at hand. In contrast to production understood as the uniform and rule-governed process of imposing form on a passive material substance, I will stress acts of improvisation and adaptation to the specific potentials and limitations of a building revealed through successive stages of disassembling. This understanding of pro-

duction draws particularly on anthropologist Tim Ingold’s (2012) account of practice, where artisans engage and “co-respond” with materials by following their particular flows and bents. Similarly, craftspeople may anticipate a material response based on previous experience and acquired knowledge, but the potentials of materials are not given in advance. Rather, they emerge between the artisan’s gesture and the material response at a “threshold of emergence” (Ingold 2012: 435). Production in this sense is not about imposing ideas and concepts unto pliable, material stuff; production is also *co-response* (ibid.). As a consequence, the contribution made by things *in* and *to* practice, extends beyond a role as scaffolds or mnemonic props for cultural memory, and instead compels a recognition of how different materials engender different approaches to conservation.

Materials are, in the following case study, considered less as neutral carriers of memory, and more as relays which enable and draw together past events with specific memory practices in the present. The materiality of different memory media, such as landscapes, buildings, and monuments exercise considerable leverage on memory practices in the present (Erl 2010). This kind of material agency is recognized when the focus of attention shifts from what things *mean* to what things *do* (Damsholt, Mordhorst & Simonsen 2009; Bencard 2014; Witcomb 2010; Waterton & Dittmer 2014; Connor 2016). Things and the material environment are implicated on the fundamental level of heritage practice by prompting action, instructing movement, and informing or even redirecting practices of problem-solving and decision-making. Conservation practice relies on specialized knowledge of different materials and the limitations these pose on long-term maintenance, and these practices do not always follow a pre-scripted procedure, but require the continual translation of general principles into a specific material context.

In the context of museal fieldwork and field collecting, the practice of disassembling buildings takes place away from the “home base” (Harrison 2018), and this situation imposes certain restric-

tions on the manner of work in terms of budgetary concerns, a set working period, local conditions, and cultural contexts, which also require the goodwill of local actors. In an attempt to describe the heritage assemblage and the fieldwork operations of Norsk Folkemuseum, I also draw on Rodney Harrison who describes the heritage experts' routes to, conceptions of, and modes of entry into the field. Also, significantly in this context: "the routes through which these heritage experts and their assembled materials return to base [...] and the mechanisms through which the materials and data they have collected are subjected to institutionally specific processes of ordering and classification" (Harrison 2018: 1376). The latter aspect touches on a fundamental point in that in heritage-making a world "out there" is translated to a new reality "in here". The sensitivity to local context, material particularity, and the historical fabric of each individual context requires a professional flexibility, a willingness to treat every new heritage object as a unique challenge while also adhering to long-established, institutionalized procedures. Finally, and drawing on new materialist approaches in heritage studies, the following account attempts to uncouple the strong tie between cultural memory and material stasis, by foregrounding the lively and composite temporal character of materials (cf. Desilvey 2017). Materials are never fully exhausted by their present form. The thesis of presentism, which holds that the prevailing contemporary temporal experience is one of being stuck on a "treadmill of an unending now" (Hartog 2015: xv), neglects the sense that a myriad of conflicting temporalities converge in the present. The implication is that the present is interlaced with residues, "thick with all of those pasts" (Ruffel 2018: 63), which can exercise agency and make a difference even though we expect, and often certainly prefer, the past to be gone and buried (Olivier 2011; Olsen 2010).

Finnmark 1956 – Reconstruction Architecture in the Field and at the Museum

Norsk Folkemuseum was founded in 1894, and in 1907 it incorporated buildings from King Oscar II's

collection founded in 1881 as what is usually considered the first open-air museum in the world. In 1898, Norsk Folkemuseum acquired a large plot of land on the Bygdøy peninsula west of Christiania (Oslo from 1925), which would host the buildings exhibition in a gradually evolving park-like landscape in a tranquil area west of the city. The open-air museum collected vernacular log buildings from Norwegian agricultural regions, and from 1914 the museum expanded its collection to include urban architecture from Christiania, a city which was being reshaped by extensive building activity at the time. For that reason, the long-time museum director at Norsk Folkemuseum, Hans Aall (1869–1946), envisioned the buildings collection at Bygdøy to serve as an "asylum which, whenever needed, would open its gates to old homeless, urban residences" (Aall 1920, appendix 4).

The open-air exhibition at Bygdøy, currently comprises 158 individual buildings. The eclectic array of buildings includes a four-storey urban apartment building, a nineteenth-century working-class neighbourhood with modest wooden houses from the Christiania suburb of Enerhaugen, as well as a comprehensive range of vernacular log buildings organized topographically in farmyards bearing the name of their place of origin like Setesdalen, Gudbrandsdalen and Hallingdalen. The more recent additions to the collection are two post-World War II buildings from the Porsanger municipality in Finnmark: a barn from Indre Billefjord built in the late 1940s, and a residential house from Olderfjord built in 1951. These more recent acquisitions, are the first buildings from northern Norway to be exhibited in the open-air museum. The exteriors and interiors of the two buildings have been meticulously restored to resemble the post-war condition. The museum exhibition in the Olderfjord house, which opened in May 2019, tells the story of the reconstruction in the region after the occupying German Wehrmacht's scorched earth retreat in 1944 and 1945. The exhibition is based, *inter alia*, on interviews with members of the family who lived in the house until the 1980s. These buildings, which have been rebuilt *ex situ* at the museum using mostly original materials

brought along from Finnmark, are typical of the so-called reconstruction architecture which played a central role in the rebuilding of Finnmark and Nord-Troms after the war. Following the armistice between Finland and the USSR in 1943, the 20th Mountain Army of the Wehrmacht were ordered to retreat southwest to the Lyngen defence line in Troms County. All civilians east of the Lyngenfjord were ordered to evacuate, and German fire troops systematically destroyed buildings, harbours, farm buildings, bridges, telegraph poles and other infrastructure to halt the advance of Soviet forces. More than 12,000 homes were destroyed or burnt down in the course of only a few months (Jaklin 2016).

The Finnmark exhibition at Norsk Folkemuseum is an acknowledgement of the wider cultural significance of the reconstruction in the development of the Norwegian post-war welfare state, but also a recognition of the tremendous toils of civilians who suffered the consequences of the scorched earth tactics and the forced evacuations during the final stage of the war. The reconstruction of a region larger than mainland Denmark required a massive mobilization of building materials, construction workers, transport services, planners, and bureaucrats. More than 100 architects moved to Troms and Finnmark to take up work in a total of seven public reconstruction offices, which were established shortly after the war to administer the rebuilding (Hage 2005: 100). Post-war reconstruction architecture was largely based on standard designs that had either won bids in nationwide architectural competitions or been designed by the district architect's office. In order for homeowners to obtain loans from the Norwegian State Housing Bank (est. 1946), house plans had to comply with some key requirements which would assure affordable, simple, but also robust buildings which would improve living standards.

Already in 1940, the Committee for War Reparations (Krigsskadetrygdens gjenreisningsnemd) laid down the principles for the rebuilding of domestic housing in Norway after the war. These required that “[h]ouses will have to satisfy the requirements of good architecture and, in a timely form, reflect regional building traditions” (Krigsskadetrygdens gjenreisningsnemd

1940: 18). The notion of a “timely” architecture has come to be associated with architectural modernism and the attempt to supersede the stylistic chaos of historic revivalism in the nineteenth century. The modernist call for an honest, unpretentious and confident national style in the interwar years, resurfaced in the search for an architectural program which could facilitate the colossal task of post-war reconstruction. The then social democratic Norwegian Prime Minister, Einar Gerhardsen (1897–1987), claimed that architects who found themselves confronted with the challenge of designing proper housing in the war-torn country should resist whims of fashion and momentary ideals, and that unnecessary stylistic excess aligned poorly with the modesty now urgently called for (Gerhardsen 1946). A reconstruction house typically combined key national stylistic precedents such as the saddle roof and the central chimney, while also incorporating modern planning ideals like the rationally ordered work environment for housewives (Hage 1999). The characteristically homogenous architecture of square or rectangular, mostly wooden reconstruction houses with saddle roofs nicknamed “sugar cube houses” is still a predominant feature of the region's built environment (Schmidt & Willhjelm 1999: 38).

An assumption of “timeliness” is often reiterated in heritage and museum work where there is a strong desire for objects which provide evidence for the specific character of an age, nation or mentality as “windows into particular times, places and mentalities” (Preziosi 2003: 19). Both material processes and the complex social lives of things may at times blur the clear outlines of objects and the processes through which heritage renders unruly things as timely objects, as objects which are regarded as belonging to one time and that time alone. It is often in the capacity of reflecting particular places at specific points in time that objects enter into museums, and in this regard, it makes sense to frame museum and heritage work as the friction between composite timely objects and wild temporal beings. A timely *object* is the specific capture, position or fixation of *things*, the latter, in contrast, connotes material processes unfolding over time (Domínguez Rubio 2016).

The ambition of Norsk Folkemuseum has been to render the complex and chaotic material reality of an abandoned house into a more crystalline expression, a “snapshot”, as one of my interviewees from the museum told me, of life in Finnmark in the 1950s. This process is complicated by the reverence for the memories which abandoned buildings hold. Timeliness has been compared with the term “authenticity” in preservation settings and museum contexts, in the sense that authenticity suggests a legible material relation between a style and its time. Authenticity is the ideal of timeliness applied retrospectively to historic buildings and objects (Rustad 2009). Different forms of architecture and the specific material constitution of buildings will condition the timely in different ways. The labour which ultimately yields a snapshot of a given day and age, relies on the preservationist’s ability to unpack and suspend ongoing material (de)composition, in order to stabilize it as a *bona fide*, timely museum object.

The house from Olderfjord was built in 1951 and belonged to one family for three decades until it was sold in 1981. In the past four decades the house was primarily used as a weekend cottage and the lack of major renovation allowed it to retain many of its characteristic post-war features (Sandvik 2016). The house was later permanently abandoned, and had been more or less empty for ten years when Norsk Folkemuseum acquired the buildings for its collection and moved them to Bygdøy in 2016. As has been the case with several buildings acquired by Norsk Folkemuseum in the course of its history, the Olderfjord house would probably have faced demolition had it not been for the decision of the museum to move it to Oslo permanently for *ex situ* preservation.

In the case of the Olderfjord house, the material processes of decomposition and subsidence are enmeshed in the production of a peculiar timeliness, which museum visitors will recognize as the feeling of stepping into a typical 1950s kitchen. The paradox is that the museal still life, which is articulated in the museum display, is conditioned by what was in fact unruly matter – the moving and pulsing of a building erected on shaky lands on the side of

the road passing through Olderfjord. This is why it makes sense to treat also materials as makers of heritage in the volatile relation between curatorial intent and material contingency. When I first entered the abandoned building in May 2016, it was apparent that the Olderfjord house would have been uninhabitable without extensive renovation work due to structural damage in the foundation and leaks from the roof. The chimney had partly collapsed on the basement floor and the house had not undergone any major renovation in recent decades. The advanced material decay suggested that the decision to move the house would not meet any objections, even if there are clear preferences for *in situ* approaches in both architectural conservation and in the museum world.

In recent decades, the practice of moving buildings from their original location to a museum site for preservation has become the exception rather than the rule, and Norsk Folkemuseum has only acquired a limited range of new objects for their permanent collections. Two decades ago, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 152) claimed that the great collecting phase of museums was over, and this is also reflected in the more restrictive collection policies in museums of cultural history like Norsk Folkemuseum. The buildings at the core of the museum project *Finnmark 1956* are nevertheless considered important exceptions to the ideal of *in situ* salvage and conservation (Jensen 2016). The weight distribution on the four pillars of museum work of collection, conservation, research, and communication has shifted throughout the twentieth century, from extensive, universal collections towards more specific and specialized exhibition projects. New acquisitions are often limited to specific research and communication purposes in a specific thematic field, such as, in this case, reconstruction architecture.

Situated Knowledge – Learning by Undoing

In August 2018, I was given permission to join a group of 12 employees from Norsk Folkemuseum during a hectic work week in the field as the buildings in Porsanger were documented, dismantled

board by board, labelled, and packed into containers that would bring them almost 2,000 kilometres further south to their new location in Oslo. I never had any formal role in the museum project and my participation was motivated by my research interests in reconstruction architecture, historic preservation, heritage and museum work. The most difficult challenge of the fieldwork was striking a balance between the observational mode and a more proactive interrogative role, wherein I would raise questions and approach staff members at regular intervals to have them explain the work they were carrying out. I documented some of the talks with an audio recorder, which could also be enough to offset people or interrupt the workflow. For some, my presence at the construction site would perhaps be experienced as a little odd, as I was the only one without any specific designated tasks in the process. In the most stressful periods of this work, I could sense some aggravation over my questions when there were surely other more pressing tasks and time was scarce. It was important both for me and for the museum staff to make the most of the week we spent in Finnmark, and the process of disassembling also entailed phases when work was particularly challenging and progressed slower than expected. Wooden boards get stuck, dry up, and crack, and this made me acutely aware of how these buildings exerted a kind of stubborn refusal to come apart which would eventually also affect my own approach in the field, which had to be adjusted accordingly, to the pace of the work and the cooperativeness of the material. Like construction work, disassembling also relies on the successful orchestration of people, tools, practices, and material in a setting that is temporary, delimited by the expected duration of the work and a set budget.

The site itself presents a slowness, a specific tempo where work progress is determined by the pliancy of the material. Material recalcitrance makes it difficult to take apart something that has been in place for a long time. As a consequence, the house itself seemed to exercise a kind of agency in the way materials resisted easy dismantling, which affected the progress of the work and compelled continuous testing of methods to ascertain how specific

materials work and what kind of techniques prove more efficient in removing boards without causing damage to the material. There is clearly a difference between working *with* and working *on* the material. One carpenter from Norsk Folkemuseum, who had previously worked with vernacular log buildings as well as medieval stave churches, told me that each and every preservation project was unique and presented a new set of challenges and potentials. The post-war building in the far north was no exception, and the initial phase was about trying to figure out just how much force one could apply to the crowbar without cracking the wooden panel boards, which had dried around the nails.

When the team from the building preservation section returned to Oslo after one week, the remaining work was to be handed over to a local contractor who needed to be accustomed to the museal approach to dismantling. In the duration of the week, the local contractor was trained in the practice of carefully taking things apart and labelling material so that it could be reassembled *ex situ* at the museum in Oslo, after a period of being stored in containers. The labelling system is key to understanding where each individual plank, beam, and list belongs in the final jigsaw puzzle. The contractor had to acquire knowledge of the museal mindset, of how the material fabric was treated by building conservators. The contractor told me that the careful and meticulous process of taking down a house piece by piece was a somewhat new experience. When taking down a house, he was more familiar with using a crowbar, chainsaw, and sledgehammer.

It was in the process of trying to manoeuvre the construction site, moving from one floor to the next, stepping through an open window and onto the scaffold which encircled the building, or going down the narrow stairways and into the damp, cramped, and dark basement without being in the worker's way, that I realized that the building itself played a significant part in orchestrating the way research was carried out and in providing access to, or concealing, the different layers of its own past. In the attempt to preserve and retain certain

memories, other memories are obscured. This is not only the case with collective memory, but also with material memory. The conservators and carpenters have to develop the ability to follow the lead of the particular bent of materials, and it is in this intersection of “thingly” assertion with the aspirations of conservationists that the notion of a passive material world awaiting the active hylomorphic act of humans imposing form to matter starts to dissolve (Ingold 2012). Rather, dismantling a building is a way of developing a knowledge of its material history and the specific challenges it presents, not only for long-term preservation, but also in the short-term effort of pulling it apart efficiently without compromising the condition of fragile materials. “Materials, thus, carry on, undergoing continual modulation as they do so. In the phenomenal world, every material is a becoming,” writes Ingold (2012: 435).

Prior knowledge of the Oldersfjord house and its construction was limited when the museum’s staff started working, but this knowledge was gained by removing floor boards, exterior wall panelling, window frames, ventilation shafts, and tapestry in a process of learning-by-(un)doing. One of the carpenters from the museum told me that disassembling was a way of getting to know the house, and also trying to understand the mindset of its builder at the time it was built. What became apparent to me was that in the practice of dismantling buildings within a set time limit, it was important to find a way of working with materials which was quick and efficient, but also conscientious in attending to the particular disposition of the materials. Ingold has argued that artisans do not apply form to inert matter, rather they enter into an exchange with the material at hand: “Their every technical gesture is a question, to which the material responds according to its bent. In following their materials, practitioners do not so much interact as co-respond with them” (Ingold 2012: 435). Understood as a process of a similar kind, building preservation does not simply force a prefigured concept unto the historical fabric, it works through a negotiation with the material histories and the unique properties of materials which play a role in delimiting the present leeway of action.

Authenticity and Material Variability

While working with buildings in the context of field collecting draws on the principles of institutional forbearers and established practices of building conservation at the museum, the material fabric of each new project is bound to bring up new concerns that are not explicitly addressed in the more general guidelines. This is why the notion of authenticity requires alignment with the oftentimes unruly material at hand. As opposed to the idea that authenticity is an intrinsic quality of material objects, or conversely, a discursive label which may be arbitrarily wrapped around any historic object, Siân Jones and Thomas Yarrow (2013) argue that authenticity is a “distributed property” which emerges in the intersection between acquired skills and the particular material context at hand, and by translating general principles to a local sensitivity enabled by the acquired experience of craftspeople. Most importantly, expert knowledge and skilled practice are refracted through specific material contexts, and authenticity is seen as arising from the interplay “between a range of people and things enjoined in a complex nexus of action” (Jones & Yarrow 2013: 17). A building embodies several agents involved in its continual making and re-making, from algal films to significant weather events and past or present animal inhabitants (ibid.). The idea that a historic building can be extracted from history and its material change arrested, contrasts for instance with how stonemasons regard their own work on historic fabrics as being part of the enduring tradition, or “unbroken chain” of skilled stonemasonry (ibid.: 23). As a consequence, different notions of authenticity may converge on one site where they engage a specific challenge which requires translation of abstract principles to the local, material context.

In the case of relocations of buildings to open-air museums, the practice is usually not considered legitimate, save as a last resort when all else fails. General principles that apply to *in situ* historic conservation are laid down in charters like the Burra Charter first adopted in 1979 (Australia ICOMOS 2013) and the Venice Charter (ICOMOS 1964). Both charters explicitly advise against relocation, except

when its future on-site survival is unlikely. The heritage value of the site, that is, the original location, is integral to conservation doctrine, which is why *ex situ* approaches requires a translation of ideal principles which derive largely from other material and cultural contexts. Architect and long-time building conservator Lars Roede (2010) has observed that international policies regarding conservation of historic buildings, originate in cultural contexts where stone building is more widespread and that specific techniques of conservation, such as stone indenting, might make far less sense in the context of vernacular wooden architecture, if only for the reason that wood and stone decompose differently. One might argue that the highly specific material training of craftspeople, offer not only different perspectives or perceptions of the same object, but that expertise enact or “literalize different kinds of material object” (Jones & Yarrow 2013: 7). Important in this regard is the sense that materials partake in the production of different temporal realities, that materials have not only representational, but also performative effects (Hawkins 2018). This observation is also relevant in terms of how the vexed issue of “authenticity” is negotiated in practice through encounters with materials that tend to align poorly with general guidelines and has to be translated to local practice and specific material rasters.

As might be expected given the budget constraints, work hour limitations, and limited space available for storage and transport of furniture and building materials, Norsk Folkemuseum’s practice of disassembling buildings is a continual negotiation where informed decisions have to be made about what kind of materials can be saved, what is expandable, and what might be kept in reserve as a potential future resource in the final design of the exhibition. The simple rule is that the more original building materials and original parts from the interior are collected, the more options are available for the final *ex situ* reconstruction and exhibition design. An important distinction was made in my conversation with a conservator who spoke figuratively of the difference between burning bridges, and keeping all doors open by saving as much as possible from

the original material fabric of the Olderfjord house. With regards to the extent of material assembled in the field, from the house, this may well be regarded as the “mode of entry” into the field (Harrison 2018). A significant aspect concerning this attitude is the potential for reversibility (reversible intervention), and keeping options open upon returning from the field by assuring that the net is cast wide enough. Acquired objects which may be highly relevant for research purposes are sometimes less relevant for exhibition purposes.

This particular mode of entry relies both on established institutional policy, which coheres to some extent with principles for “work and ordering” laid down by Norsk Folkemuseum’s first director in 1925 (Aall 1925), but also suggests that the purpose of acquisition and exhibition differs from object to object. Aall established important guidelines for many facets of museum work, which address several key facets of how disassembling and reconstruction of building works today. Aall acknowledged that the array of different temporalities apparent in a building or uncovered through dismantling could engender a change of approach while work was underway. Restoration to one specific historical condition was considered more “brutal” than the procedure which applied if buildings were acquired to convey the stylistic and constructional changes apparent in one structure (Aall 1925: 73). Aall stated that, during the uncovering of walls and ceilings or upon dismantling, one could “reveal rooms which do not fit with the time a building was restored to” (Aall 1925: 74). The individual rooms would, in other words, often be non-contemporaneous. The same applies to decorations or details in the construction which did not cohere stylistically with the building period: “We would have to leave an entire room, a part of the room or a section of the house as a historical document with no stylistic coherence with the restored building” (ibid.). Aall’s reflections hint at the rich temporal compound present in many buildings, and the sense that a material reality does not always correspond with the ideal of stylistic or historical unity and “timeliness”.

In the context of reconstruction architecture being moved to the museum, the chronotope *Finnmark 1956* constituted an overarching framework of what would fall within the scope of the preservation project, and the specific time and place visitors to Norsk Folkemuseum would encounter in the final exhibition. The project brief stated that, although a large portion of the building material was corrupted by moist, rot, and fungi, it was important to retain original materials which could be reused. It could also be feasible to preserve some building materials from the Olderfjord house, even if they did not end up in the re-erected museum building. Things that were damaged or fell beyond the scope of the project would sometimes be discarded after photographic documentation, and recording the dimensions of different construction materials.

Authenticity is a contested concept but it persists as a powerful institutional vector with far-reaching consequences for actual practices in the field. Several of the discussions during Norsk Folkemuseum's fieldwork in Finnmark in 2016 concerned authenticity in one way or another, especially with regard to the decision to use original materials as opposed to replacing them with reproductions. Several of my interviewees stated that it was worthwhile for the credibility of the final exhibition to spend extra hours salvaging as much of the original material as possible. There are, arguably, three different forms of authenticity operative in the open-air museum context which illustrate the vast range of choices available in the process of reconstructing buildings *ex situ*. One might usefully distinguish between *visual*, *material*, and *processual* authenticity (Roede 2010). The first dimension is predominantly experiential and suggests that, as a minimum, the material which is visible to the museum visitor needs to retain the authentic *look*, so as to not undermine the sense of historical credibility and truthfulness that the museum wants to convey through exhibitions (Roede 2010). It may, for instance, be more important for a museum exhibition to create a convincing historical tableau than to retain all original building parts from a relocated building as required to maintain a complete material authenticity. Open-air

museums differ in several important regards from traditional monument preservation since the stress on the originality of specific source material implies that "later additions, repairs and revisions are likely to be regarded as less authentic" (Jones 2009: 134). Processual authenticity provides a possible way out of this impasse when original materials have to be replaced due to decay. If something is repaired or replaced, the new material is prepared using traditional methods, as well as equipment and tools that were available in the period it belongs to, as a way of safeguarding the preservation of practical know-how. The way the concept of authenticity is operationalized with regard to museum preservation of relocated buildings usually involves a pragmatic trade-off between using only original materials, and ensuring that a building will not deteriorate over time due to visitor traffic combined with the poor condition of structures.

The process of moving a building will invariably compromise its material authenticity, and some aspects of the original structure (such as binding materials) (Roede 2010) are bound to be lost in the translation from "out there" to "in here". Original materials do still play an important role in the experiential conception of authenticity by virtue of their physical ties to the historical and geographical origins, which are often regarded as important for an exhibition's historical credibility. Employees from the building preservation section also emphasized the retaining original material as a central part of the work done on site in Finnmark: "We should not reject it outright even though it does require more [conservation] work later. When we are carrying out the job anyway, we might as well aspire to bring as much original material [to the museum] as possible."

The concern for material authenticity has to be traded off against the broader curatorial aim of the specific exhibition. In the Finnmark project, the preservation of the original material is important, even though the most apparent signs of patina attained over time will be few in the final Finnmark exhibition. The exterior walls will have been repainted, and the sun-bleached wooden boards will appear almost as they did when the family first moved in.

The tolerance for material ageing is more articulate in projects with a less distinct and narrow temporal frame, where change over time is in fact part of the historical narrative. The story of the post-war reconstruction in Finnmark, and how this experience shaped the life of the actual family living in the house, is conveyed by aligning the material surroundings with a fairly narrow temporal cross-section, a slice of life as it materialized in the mid-1950s. The actual material conditions when the building was first inspected does nevertheless impose certain restrictions on the leeway of curatorial action, in the sense that the temporal threshold is informed by the biography of the house, and to what extent and in what form certain times are preserved in its material fabric. In the Olderfjord house, electric power for lighting was installed in 1956, and this gave the museum the opportunity to convey a sense of change over time from the building year to the installation of new domestic technology five years later. A transparent brown linoleic oil paint was also well preserved underneath a layer of bright pink alkyd paint, which was applied *after* the electric power was installed, and it could be recovered through conservation at the museum in Oslo. It is important to note the differences between multi-layered buildings and more temporally uniform structures associated with older vernacular log building structures, as the latter seems to afford mobility while also allowing the maintenance of a sense of coherence between the *ex situ* and *in situ* object.

There are no universal criteria of authenticity which can be translated to all contexts and all situations involving different types of objects. There are substantial differences between established guidelines for monument protection and the practice of preserving and exhibiting relocated buildings. The latter was even considered the antithesis of “proper” antiquarian practice because it broke the all-important tie between vernacular buildings and the landscape, and between the traditions and community that spawned them (Müller 1897; Krag 1914). The tradition of moving buildings was nevertheless widespread in rural contexts where log buildings were often pulled apart and moved to a different location, or reused as building materials for new

buildings. The specific materiality of log buildings also allowed for the extensive collection of buildings in Scandinavian open-air museums. The vernacular log-building tradition allowed movement and aligned extremely well with *ex situ* building preservation in folk museums in the early twentieth century, due to the fact that the gap between the original building and the re-erected museum building was less pronounced than in multi-layered constructions (Roede 2010). Log buildings consisted of fairly homogenous walls that were both supportive and visible from the inside, and which could easily be disassembled and reassembled in a form that corresponded well with the original situation (Roede 2010: 170). These material properties aligned well with the ambitious aims of national open-air museums to collect representative samples of vernacular building traditions from all over the country. It is difficult to imagine the rapid growth in the building collections in the early twentieth century without this kind of material mobility. The development of open-air museums coincided with the expansion of the railways from the 1890s, and occasionally museums were granted free railway transport for relocations of buildings (Hegard 1984).

The matter is different with composite wooden buildings from affluent, urban contexts that were covered with several layers of wall panels, paint or wallpaper. These had often undergone substantial alterations, or been extended over the years to such a degree that the original profile or form was rendered invisible. In such cases, buildings triggered and still trigger a range of questions for conservators concerning which particular style historical epoch would prevail in the display, and if the non-visible supportive structures needed to be original, or if they could be replaced without compromising the sense of timeliness in the exhibited building. Walls covered with several layers of panelling, paint or tapestry often yields a neatly stratified style chronology, where successive phases may be rendered through a “paint stratigraphy”.

This specific material composition of layered textures lends itself to a linear, successional rendition of time and historical change – whereas a more

homogenous log wall structure displays both the distant and recent past on the same continuous surface. Interestingly, a central distinction was made by Hans Aall between museum objects from urban and rural contexts. Objects from urban contexts were registered chronologically and rural items were ordered according to their place of origin, based on the premise that urban culture was historical and characterized by change and progress, whereas rural culture was local and determined by the almost timeless character of place (Eriksen 2009: 144; 2014: 109). Materials from the countryside reinforced the idea of a stubborn long-term persistence unaffected by European stylistic development and “the acceleration of time”, whereas the chronologically ordered urban artefacts reflected rapid changes in popular taste (Resløkken & Ødemark 2015: 71). The decision to present a snapshot of the Olderfjord house by recovering its partly hidden, historical layer, suggests a middle ground between the diachronic and synchronic approach. Style history is present not as change over time, but as a limited temporal cross-section of post-war architecture which maintains regional characteristics and the national traditions in a timely form. The leverage of materials in this specific case of heritage-making, has to do with the fragile intersection between persistence and decomposition that museum conservators encounter in abandoned buildings. This condition may be called “transmission” (Chouquer in Tamm & Olivier 2019: 14) to suggest that through sustained non-intervention, such buildings may still retain the material integrity required to pass on a “heritage of forms” (ibid.) (*transmission*), but they also, and equally important, undergo change over time (*transformation*).

Unwieldy Objects and Dis-integrating Architecture

The Olderfjord house provides a glimpse of how the material traces of past events and material processes gained influence in the production of heritage. Abandonment and lack of major, structural alterations made it possible for museum staff to work with an object which still retained most of its original properties, reflecting how the house would have

looked like in the 1950s. The fact that the original condition was retained to such an extent makes the house different from many reconstruction houses from the period, which have been extensively renovated and annexed over the years. In fact, people living in reconstruction houses today, rarely refer to them as such. They are simply houses, and the typical reconstruction house has changed in accordance with new living standards, new domestic technologies and economic growth. This makes the Olderfjord house a particularly timely exception.

Over the course of the last decades, leaks in the roof's damaged tar paper and on two corners of the house had caused extensive rot, which meant that a lot of the original materials had to be replaced in the process of rebuilding the house at the open-air museum. This is a highly ambiguous process for museum conservators who have expressed an interest in salvaging as much as possible from the original structure. On the one hand, material decay has prevented a complete *ex situ* reconstruction of the house using only original beams, rough panel, and wall panelling. On the other hand, the very same disrepair and material decomposition has yielded a number of possibilities for the museum to work with a building that has not been extensively refitted, renovated, or substantially altered since it was first built. Shortly after the Second World War, there was a dire shortage of construction materials in Finnmark, which slowed down reconstruction work considerably. Many houses were built with the resources at hand and with the ambition of minimizing construction costs. In Olderfjord, the foundations of the house were cast in concrete mixed with plum stones, and without using steel reinforcing bars. This was not unusual at the time, however, and the house was conscientiously built by competent builders, but over time this decision would cause the foundation to sink, particularly as the clayey ground underneath the house was exposed to the increasing pressure from the main road passing by to the south of the house. With each new layer of asphalt, the pressure from the road is likely to have added to the movement which caused cracks in the foundation, which sunk under the weight of the house.

The first impression I got during my fieldwork in 2016 was that of an abandoned house, caught at a standstill in time. This turned out to be ill-informed. It was not a static or frozen entity, but one that had been moving, sinking, dispersing, and transforming for quite some time, and which was still moving imperceptibly under my feet. Furniture had been sold or given away, but the material mobility was also caused by ground movement, seasonal temperature variation, and structural flaws. At some point in time, it would have become difficult for the residents to shut the doors of the house properly because of the subsiding foundation, which also, eventually, caused the chimney to collapse into the basement floor. The settling damage, which in all likelihood accelerated over the years, relates closely to events that took place at the time of construction. This demonstrates the idea that the ongoing transformation of the building is how its past is materialized as memory in the present. This also affects the form it assumes as a museum display and makes it difficult to envision it as material index of stubborn long-term persistence. Its career as permanent dwelling was, after all, fairly short.

Changes in construction methods will affect the future of building collections. Not only will contemporary museum workers be forced to critically assess the voluminous collections of their predecessors, they will also recognize the restrictions that changing materiality of the built environment impose on collection activities. This implies that open-air museums are no longer obliged to shelter for the historical flotsam that urban renewals yield when *in situ* building conservation has had to concede defeat (Roede 2010). The commitment to provide, like Hans Aall envisioned, shelter and care for architectural structures abandoned by the relentless march of time, has been replaced by more discriminating collection and communication policies. Contemporary open-air museums are forced to privilege some projects over others, based *inter alia* on the lacking public recognition of particular events or periods in national history such as the scorched earth retreat in Finnmark and the post-war reconstruction. The transition from fairly mobile dwellings to more un-

wieldy structures changes the extent, frequency, and techniques of relocations. Our contemporary dwellings grow increasingly stationary as row upon row of massive, prefab concrete wall elements are assembled on site to prepare for the arrival of readymade bathrooms which are lowered into new suburban apartment complexes. The very idea of an open-air museum which collected and exhibited full-scale buildings, was materially conditioned by buildings that were in fact collectable.

In a similar context, Domínguez Rubio (2014) has noted the important difference between unwieldy and portable artworks. He suggests that oil paintings belong in the latter category and more complex media-art in the former. The important point, according to Domínguez Rubio, is that the introduction of media art in the world of art museums causes disruption, and acts as a vector for cultural and institutional change (Domínguez Rubio 2014: 621). The specific, material properties of such art works suggest that they cannot always be placed into existing object-positions, but require creative adaptations and new areas of competence. In contrast to oil paintings, it is difficult to determine unequivocally the boundaries of media-art, which may consist of several components, media players, monitors, cables, data files, storage media, etc. (Domínguez Rubio 2014: 637). Are broken cables replaceable or would replacement undermine the artistic expression by removing a part of the original art work? This situation affects the classificatory practices at the museum, and requires new areas of competence in order to persist over time, for example by transferring videos from obsolete media technologies to new media formats without tampering with the original look. Arguably with the transition from log buildings to more complex, multi-layered buildings like the Olderfjord house we see a similar shift. This specific form of architecture and the specific materiality of its memory, requires creative adaptations of abstract principles to correspond with the actual condition and potentials of the materials at hand. The distinction between visual and material authenticity can be credibly translated and applied in practice, because several material layers exist in the Olderfjord house.

Its specific material constitution has thus yielded creative, but also pragmatic adaptations of the original house which would in all likelihood not have aged gracefully where it once stood. By responding to the material “bent” (Ingold 2012: 435) of this particular house and its history, museum practices may be understood as a continual negotiation with different materials. By acknowledging that museum conservation offers but one suspended snapshot structured by the temporal threshold of 1956, staff from Norsk Folkemuseum seems to also acknowledge the complexity of both material and human biographies which always exceed the impression left by one particular time and place. The articulation that the present strives to impose on historical materials will invariably be refracted through past events and interlaced with different material modes of unfolding towards the future, via different routes of decomposition and re-composition, while still remaining continuous with the physical thing of the past. This is, I believe, the mystery of material memory and its preservation, that the thesis of presentism fails to convey.

In sum, it is perhaps fair to say that the possible routes towards the final exhibition house were multiplying with each encounter with a specific inventory object in the house, which was assessed with regards to geographical origin, time period, condition, and also its ability to convey stories. Through fieldwork in the context of museal collecting, it has become more apparent that heritage work and preservation of historic buildings does not occur in a vacuum detached from the specific materiality of the acquired object. It has been important for the museum to capture a sense of lived life by, as far as possible, using the original building materials and interiors from the Olderfjord house and the personal belongings of the actual family who used to live in the house. Personal items, but also the living room walls carry the imprints of the people who used to live there. As material memory, these objects embody relations between people and place, which have been dormant for years, but are now, all of a sudden, rekindled. With the public attention the Finnmark project garnered, and through different

public meetings, workshops, and conversations with local inhabitants, the museum has been able to track down furniture that was part of the original interior and had changed hands several times over the years. Such objects are important in fostering and sustaining short- or long-term relations between a museum and the wider public sphere. And while the “social life of things” (Appadurai 1986) is key to understanding how things change as they enter new domains of valuation, their specific *social ecology* does not tell the whole story. Upon disintegrating, a “creaturely” material memory unfolds along unexpected trajectories that serve to highlight the difference between a fixed and finite object and its “thingly” ecology of unravelling (Domínguez Rubio 2016).

Material Memory and Museums as Collections of Processes

Materials come to matter also by virtue of the relations they forge that can make or unmake, and sustain or redistribute the memories things hold. The virtue of a new materialist understanding of memory is that it extends the purview of research beyond the discrete object, in a way which brings natural and human history together in the same frame (Rigney 2017): “[C]rucially, new materialism implies that scholars study the interactions between the symbolic, the material, and the human within the broader ecology in which they operate” (Rigney 2017: 475). The discrete object in our case is a post-war building, but the building is entangled in material processes which hint at how a house reacts with ambient conditions like wind, rain, ground movement, and temperature fluctuations. These processes, understood through the framework of material memory, do not undo the object, but render it more susceptible to forces which alter the form memory assumes and impact how past events are materially articulated. The challenge for heritage preservation in this context is to preserve and maintain a discrete and “timely” material object, whose original material is altered or physically disfigured by its object biography, its concrete earthly life. It is hard to argue for one, optimal solution when faced with this challenge. Although guided by a set plan and a preferred aim, the final

form of the heritage object is not given in advance, but takes shape through problem-solving under budget and time constraints, a concern for the traces of history in the material fabric, as well as its long-term structural well-being. The latter often involves a compromise between the material authenticity of the house, and its reuse as an exhibition space. Ultimately, these decisions are made based on an assessment of the material properties of the house, as well as the stories the different building components convey.

Material memory is a central concept in getting to grips with how things literally perform the effects of their own pasts. New Materialism broadens the perspective on memory beyond a “recollective faculty exercised by humans among themselves” to see memory as an ontological feature of the world (Witmore 2014: 213). It was this concept which first made me reflect on the wide range of nonhuman agents contributing to the materialization and re-articulation of memory in the Olderfjord house. Buildings are sometimes exposed to the crosscurrents of different material movements, which chart a course that we are unable to anticipate. Changes, which may be imperceptible at first, accelerate as they merge with confluent flows, up to the point where something is eventually deemed beyond repair. Even the most insignificant, marginal notes in the material biography of a house may, given the right circumstances, exert influence which seems disproportionate to its role in the architectural identity of the house. The road, the plum stones, the clay in the ground, the absent reinforcing steel bars, and the slow churning pace of geological processes at work underneath the floorboards. These elements have become agential in the construction of a temporal pocket, which left the impression of a house that was suspended in time. Still, when we acknowledge the role of this motley material assemblage in unsettling the normal life expectancy of a house, we realize that the abandoned house was not at a standstill, even if its stylistic culture-historical evolution had ceased. The stability we expect from geological agents underneath our feet is currently also upset by the very acute sense of a change of pace, in what has been called the Anthropocene and

the age of global warming. Through a “surprising inversion of background and foreground, it is human history that has become frozen and natural history that is taking on a frenetic pace” (Latour 2014: 12).

In a museum, there is a comprehensive range of different rhythms of material change on display, even if these largely go unnoticed. Material transformation occurring within the museum walls challenges the notion of a museal time outside of time. Fernando Domínguez Rubio has shown that processes of entropy and change germane to any object – materials expanding and contracting, colours changing and withering, surfaces cracking and peeling off – may compel us to rethink “museum collections as collections of processes rather than as collections of ‘objects’” (Domínguez Rubio 2014: 621). It is becoming increasingly difficult to depict, for instance, open-air museums as cryogenically frozen collections “of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (Foucault 1986: 26).

Within the abstract category of heritage, we find practices that engage with radically different timescales of preservation and disparate materials ranging from the long-term agrobiodiversity preservation in secure seed vaults, to short-term tasks of stabilizing quickly deteriorating latex sculptures in modern art museums (Domínguez Rubio 2014; Harrison 2017). These differences in timescales will affect the physical preservation practice and determine how objects are treated within different “regimes of care” (Harrison 2015). Different domains of heritage practice have to adapt to specific temporalities and distinct pasts. Measures taken to preserve objects do not derive from one overarching, singular, and unitary temporality that applies in equal terms to all groups and kinds of artefacts. This is also why there is an important distinction to be made between approaches which recognizes heritage as a reinterpretation of certain selected pasts, and the claim that heritage has nothing to do with the past at all. It is increasingly difficult to speak of heritage in the singular. The temporalities of materials all have distinct rhythms and durations, and each building follows its own pace of disintegration and has its own peculiar historicity, and unfold

a multiplicity of pasts, not all of which are *human* pasts (Bangstad 2019a). Heritage practices are conditioned by the affordances of things, material properties which vary tremendously from the durability of prehistoric rock engravings to the ephemerality of post-war buildings. By allowing the material transformation over time to count not as opposed to, but integral to memory and meaning-making practices, I have demonstrated that the role of things in the performance of heritage reaches well beyond a role as mnemonic props or material settings for human recollection. It is for this reason that I suggest it is possible to conceive of heritage and memory without presupposing a complete rupture with objects' past, or a present which finds itself adrift and unmoored, unaware of the "massive matter of continuity" (Glassie 2003: 178) in the world.

Conclusion

What I have emphasized here as an analytical potential is the notion of material memory, which emerges through ongoing material transformation and different layers; cultural, chemical, climatic and discursive layers interacting over time. As material memory, the Olderfjord house retains a capacity to reach out beyond its own and our own immediate present, beyond its timely figuration. This is why I believe it is critical that heritage studies consider materials as integral to the performative nature of heritage-making; they are never exhausted by one specific present articulation. Things have the capacity to articulate a sense of temporality which is not defined by succession where the present eclipses the past, but combines active elements from different times in a conjunctive temporality (Harris 2008: 145). The main contribution of this article has been to show that places, buildings, and things continue to emit the effects of their pasts in unpredictable ways, which aligns poorly with the presentist idea that the past is barred and denied any influence in heritage. Through the shifting constitution of material memories in buildings, which constrains and affords memory practices in the present, I have argued that things matter not only as surfaces for in-

scription or as intermediaries of meaning, but also as the ongoing effects and enactments of events in their own pasts.

One of the problems with seeing heritage as only a reflection of present ambitions, aspirations, and ideologies, is that heritage research focuses exclusively on the intentional process of cultural recall in the present, ultimately treating the past as optional rather than an inevitable and "thrown" condition of *any* present (Pétursdóttir & Olsen 2014). The emphasis on how the present proactively shapes the past according to its ambitions and interests neglects the dimension of the past as an inescapable, lived with part of the human condition. Pasts which are considered over and done with may resurface and restrict present modes of conduct. By sticking resolutely with the present and present conditions for the recreation and remembering of the past, the presentist perspectives have avoided what Ethan Kleinberg has called the "brackish ontological waters of the past" (Kleinberg 2013: 9). Things not only outlive their intended purpose and survive their makers, they also continue to shape actions in the present. This article has also been an attempt to critically interrogate the idea of a self-contained present, and a presentist rendition of heritage by foregrounding heritage objects as ever-changing, multitemporal and occasionally unruly – as something which exceeds the homogenous temporal identity we reserve for them and work so hard to maintain. The material biographies of buildings that qualify as heritage are often long-winded and involve minor events in the past, which may turn out to have considerable impact at a later stage. This makes it difficult to determine unequivocally the time of the object, to securely and squarely tie its present articulation only to the formative years in its biography, or to the present moment of recovery. By bringing attention to material memory as a constitutive force at work in places, houses, and things, even within the sanctimoniously controlled domain of heritage, I realize that we may indeed be moved by the past, and not only in the figurative sense.

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