

## Resisting relocation and reconceptualising authenticity: the experiential and emotional values of the Southbank Undercroft, London, UK

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Rebecca Madgin<sup>a\*</sup>, David Webb<sup>b</sup>, Pollyanna Ruiz<sup>c</sup> and Tim Snelson<sup>d</sup>

*<sup>a</sup>Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, City, UK; <sup>b</sup>Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK; <sup>c</sup>Media and Communications, University of Sussex, Sussex, UK; <sup>d</sup>Film, Television and Media Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.*

[rebecca.madgin@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:rebecca.madgin@glasgow.ac.uk)

Dr Rebecca Madgin is Senior Lecturer in Urban Development and Management, University of Glasgow. Her research examines emotional attachments to urban heritage sites in a British context. She is also interested in comparative urbanism and to this end has conducted research in Europe and Asia.

Dr Dave Webb is Lecturer in Town Planning at Newcastle University. His recent research interests lie in spaces which run counter to, or are marginal to, neoliberalised statutory planning processes and in the potential contribution of these to new forms of socially centred environmental development.

Dr Pollyanna Ruiz is Senior Lecturer in Media and Communications at the University of Sussex. Her research examines the media's role in the construction of social and political change with particular reference to protest movements, digital communications and the public sphere.

Dr Tim Snelson is Senior Lecturer in Media History at the University of East Anglia and Director of the East Anglian Film Archive. His research addresses the relationship between media and social history, with particular interests in film and film cultures, and youth media and subcultures.

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## **Resisting Relocation and Reconceptualising Authenticity:**

### **The Experiential and Emotional Values of the Southbank Undercroft, London, UK**

#### **Abstract**

The tagline, ‘You Can’t Move History: You Can Secure the Future’, encapsulated the battle at the heart of the campaign to retain the Southbank Undercroft skate spot in the light of planned redevelopment of the Southbank Centre, London. The 2013-15 campaign against relocation adopted a position of no compromise and provides a lens through which three key areas of heritage theory and practice can be examined. Firstly, the campaign uses the term found space to reconceptualise authenticity and places a greater emphasis on embodied experiences of, and emotional attachments to, historic urban spaces. Secondly, the paper argues that the concept of found space opens up a discussion surrounding the role of citizen expertise in understanding the experiential and emotional values of historic urban spaces. Finally, the paper considers the wider relevance of found space in terms of reconceptualising authenticity in theory and practice. The paper is accompanied by the award-winning film ‘You Can’t Move History’ which was produced by the research team in collaboration with Paul Richards from Brazen Bunch and directed by skater, turned filmmaker, Winstan Whitter.

Keywords: experience, emotion, found space, authenticity, citizen expertise

#### **Introduction**

The tagline, ‘You Can’t Move History: You Can Secure the Future’, encapsulated the battle at the heart of the campaign to retain the ‘oldest recognised and still skated skateboarding space in the world’ ([www.llsb.com/about](http://www.llsb.com/about)) which is located in the Undercroft of the Southbank Centre and was first skated in 1973. The skate spot came under threat from the planned redevelopment of the Southbank Centre, the UK’s largest arts centre which is based on the south bank of the River Thames. As part of this redevelopment the Southbank Centre proposed to close the existing skate spot and to

relocate it to a purpose-built skate park 120 metres away. These plans were rejected by skaters and campaigners who instead adopted a position of ‘no compromise’ (Paul) as they could not countenance the loss of the Undercroft. At the heart of this campaign was a belief that the skate spot was authentic and by default the skate park was inauthentic. This paper analyses the reasons why this skate spot was seen by the campaigners as authentic. In particular, the paper reframes authenticity to include the embodied experiences of, and emotional attachments, to the space that were derived from the everyday practices of generations of skaters. In so doing it engages with emerging work that sees authenticity as something that is ‘negotiated’, ‘performed’ and ‘experienced’ (Gregory, 2008; Zhu, 2015). The paper also reframes the skaters not just as campaigners but as holders of a form of expertise that is derived from their intimate knowledge of, and familiarity with, the skate spot. This knowledge and familiarity does not fit neatly into existing categories of architectural or historic importance but enables an examination of why and how individuals become so emotionally invested in the built environment that they actively resist change. In these ways, the paper is of relevance for both the heritage sector and broader place-making agendas that seek to understand why, in certain cases, like the Southbank Undercroft, you can’t move history.

The paper uses the concept of *found space* to examine why the proposed relocation of the Undercroft was resisted by the members of the campaign group, the Long Live Southbank (LLSB). For the purposes of this paper found space is defined as ‘organically created spaces in which individuals and collectives conduct their everyday practices in ways which were not created or pre-determined by built environment professionals’. This concept drove a lot of the rhetoric around the campaign and was based on a belief that the skateboard community first *found* the space in 1973 and therefore they assumed a figurative ownership over its current and future use whereas in fact the skaters had no legal rights to the Undercroft. Contrary to existing heritage practices, the significance of the Undercroft was not rooted in the material fabric *per se* but rather in what the space *enabled* in terms of the practice of skateboarding. In line with this viewpoint, three connected tropes were revealed during the research process. Firstly, finding the space back in 1973 gave the skate spot irrefutable authenticity. Secondly, the proposed skate park was inauthentic because it could never be found. Thirdly, and finally, was a belief that the skaters were the guardians of authenticity, based on their unrivalled knowledge and experience of the found space. Together these tropes generated an

incontrovertible belief in the authenticity of the space – a belief so powerful that campaigners actively resisted relocation.

The paper is structured as follows. The literature review, which immediately follows, examines changing definitions of authenticity by focusing on experience, emotion, and expertise. It then outlines the methodological approach of the project and provides contextual detail on the case study. The third section explores the findings of the research by deconstructing three components of found space. The final section considers the wider relevance of found space in the context of reframing authenticity.

### **Authenticity, Experience, Emotion and Expertise**

‘Contemporary authenticity refers to the dynamism of social life, in contrast to the fixity of behaviour implied by terms such as an “authentic experience”’

Silverman. 2015, 85

The contention of this paper is that authenticity is not solely rooted in the materiality of a historic site but rather is fluid and connected to the everyday practices that take place in, and are shaped by, the built fabric. This version of authenticity is therefore ‘dynamic, performative, culturally and historically contingent, relative’ rather than ‘stable’ (Silverman, 2015, 69). This version aligns with ideas within international heritage discourse which acknowledge that whilst ‘attributes such as spirit and feeling do not lend themselves easily to practical applications of the conditions of authenticity’, they ‘are important indicators of character and sense of place, for example, in communities maintaining tradition and cultural continuity’ (UNESCO, 2013, 22). However, the paper argues that this reconceptualisation of authenticity needs to go one stage further to authenticate not just experience, and emotion, but to also recognise the felt experience and emotions generated by individual users.

‘Feeling’ is an ephemeral and elusive concept yet it is an inescapable aspect of urban landscapes. Indeed, ‘the lived sensation, the feel, and emotional resonance of place, defines much of the routine and tumult of city life’ (Duff, 2010, 881). There is very little consensus of what characterises the ‘feel’ of place yet there is an emerging body of work in heritage studies and cultural geography that focuses on the experiential and emotional

values of heritage landscapes (Gregory, 2015; Jones, 2016; Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson, 2017).

Emotion is still seen as the ‘elephant in the room’ (Smith and Campbell, 2016, 433) of heritage studies. However, an emerging body of work has examined its presence in a variety of heritage contexts including tourist sites (Voase, 2007; Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson, 2017). Smith argued that ‘emotional or subjective activity’ is not acknowledged outside of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) which instead favoured ‘facts’, ‘remembrance’ or ‘commemoration’ (2006, 58). This view can be applied across society more broadly, particular in the context of town and country planning where Baum notes planners ‘largely resist recognising emotion’ because ‘Western culture downplays the role of emotion in human behaviour’ (2015, 498). Partly due to the reasons outlined by Smith and Baum, emotion remains an elusive area within heritage theory and practice but can be seen as both a driving force for campaigns to prevent the potential loss of the historic environment. Indeed, the ‘continued existence of familiar surroundings may satisfy a psychological need, which even if irrational, is very real. Nothing gives more tangible assurance of stability than bricks and mortar’ (Hubbard, 1993, 363). This supposedly ‘irrational’ need has driven a number of community campaigns, some of which led to conservation-led urban regeneration schemes in late twentieth-century Britain (Madgin, 2010) and leads more broadly to pro-environmental behaviour (Carrus *et al*, 2014). Emotion therefore is a key aspect of understanding why people want to campaign to prevent changes to the existing urban environment.

Emotional attachments are often derived from the cumulative lived experience of historic places. Understanding what comprises this relationship between experience and attachment is an underdeveloped aspect of research yet existing research has identified the importance of sensory engagements including sight (O’Connor, 2011), sound (Butler, 2011), smell (Bembibre, 2017) and touch (Jones, 2009) whereas other work examines the mental stimulation involved in physical engaging with urban spaces (Stones, 2016). These kinds of experiences are downplayed within heritage management and especially in an English context which still privileges architectural and historic interest. Indeed, Emerick has called for the heritage sector in England to ‘end the tyranny of Ruskin and Morris’ (2014, 219) and instead adopt a more inclusive approach to heritage management. The introduction of Communal Value, defined as ‘the meanings of a place for the people

who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory’ (2008, 7), as one of six *Conservation Principles* by English Heritage (now Historic England) marked a move towards a more inclusive approach. However, the principle still, in 2017, has no legislative weight within heritage designation. Any focus on ‘collective experience within Communal Value is vague but is supplemented by the sub-category Social Value which is ‘associated with places that people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence’ (2008, 31-32).

The guiding policies and practices within the English system do not, therefore, go as far as the rhetoric within international charters such as the Burra Charter, the Faro Convention, and the Quebec Declaration, that ‘for many places associations will be linked to aspects of use, including activities and practices’ (Burra, 2013, 24.1). The Burra Charter goes further into the concept of use as it states that ‘sensory experiences’ are a crucial element of cultural significance whereas the Quebec Declaration includes ‘colours’ and ‘odours’ of places as crucial elements of the ‘spirit of place’ (2008, 2). Furthermore, the ICOMOS Declaration of San Antonio (1996), built on the Nara document (1994) to state that the use, function, and identity of a site are integral components of determining authenticity (Gregory, 2008, 124). In these ways, the international charters provide a recognition that whilst material fabric does have value we also need to be aware that this value is intimately connected to the feel, use, and experience of place. Authenticity therefore does not solely reside within the material fabric.

The ideas contained within the various international charters have also opened up a highly contentious debate concerning experts and expertise. Contained within this is a desire to move away from the Authorised Heritage Discourse towards a more plural and inclusive understanding of experts and expertise. This is most explicit in the Declaration of San Antonio which states that

historic research and surveys of the physical fabric are not enough to identify the full significance of a heritage site, since only the concerned communities that have a stake in the site can contribute to the understanding and expression of the deeper values of the site as an anchor to their cultural identity (1996, point 4).

The Burra Charter moves this one stage further to suggest that



Groups and individuals with *associations* with the *place* as well as those involved in its management should be provided with opportunities to contribute to and participate in identifying and understanding the *cultural significance* of the place. Where appropriate they should also have opportunities to participate in its *conservation* and management (2013, 26.3).

Requiring groups/individuals to participate in identifying cultural significance moves the debate from seeing communities as ‘concerned’ and towards seeing them as experts. Recent research in heritage studies has extended this further to suggest that in the light of these moves ‘we are all experts’ and then to question whether in fact ‘we need experts’ (Schofield, 2014, 2). This paper argues that before we assert the totalising premise that ‘we are all experts’ we first have to better understand what forms of expertise ‘we’ all have, ‘where’ this expertise is located, how it is derived, and crucially how this knowledge can help us to better understand the contemporary significance of historic places (Madgin and Taylor, 2015).

Fairclough believes that ‘knowing how to live in a place...is a form of expertise that deserves greater recognition’ (in Schofield, 2014, 245). However, what exactly comprises this expertise is often vague and summarised in phrases such as ‘sense of place’ and/or ‘place identity’ (Schofield and Szymanski, 2010). This paper introduces the concept of ‘citizen expertise’, defined as having intimate knowledge of and familiarity with particular places, as a way to try to deconstruct what comprises a form of expertise that is frequently alluded to in international charters and heritage studies. We suggest that rather than focus on totalising premises, advancing our understanding of experts and expertise requires that we interrogate why and how communities become ‘concerned’, how places become an ‘anchor’ of identity and how this is tied to people’s contemporary use of historic places. To achieve this the paper focuses on how the cumulative everyday experiences of the Southbank Undercroft embedded profound emotional attachments to the skate spot which in turn drove the campaigners to resist relocation.

### **Accessing Experiences and Emotions**

The difficulty in understanding the experiential and emotional dimensions of heritage is partly explained by the methodological tools used to assess the value of the historic environment. The categories of age, historic, and architectural interest have achieved the beacon status of irrefutable objectivity and as such sit at the heart of designation.

However, these categories have assumed their objective status as a result of the passage of time and the continual reinforcement of a set of values dominated by a narrow field of specialists, namely architectural historians and archaeologists (Smith, 2006; Emerick, 2014). In fact, these existing categories are based on subjective notions of, for example, nationally important architects, or a belief in the linear construction of time so that older equates to better or that certain buildings symbolise nationally important events. A different epistemological position based on social constructivism would suggest that this evidence is not objective but rather shaped by a minority of elite views reinforced over time since the Inspectors of Monuments developed a way of assessing importance in 1951 (Delafons, 1992).

Alongside this ontological belief is a methodological challenge to collect evidence that can support a better understanding of the experiential and emotional values of historic spaces. Qualitative social research methods are not ‘mainstream’ within heritage practice (Jones, 2016, 24) nor within heritage training as the profession is motivated by ‘speed, efficiency, and compliance’ (Wells, 2017, 26). Furthermore, it is doubtful that quantitative methods that rely on surveys to measure heritage value can ever truly capture the emotional and experiential values of the historic environment. Indeed, Wells working in a North American context, has decried the use of surveys as they produce ‘exceedingly thin depths of meaning’ and as such are a ‘poor choice for trying to discern the reasons for people's values, perceptions and behaviours’ (2015, 46-47).

The research team felt strongly that the methods we chose needed to capture the everyday practices that took place within the Undercroft. The approach taken was to conduct oral histories and walking interviews with members of the campaign and generations of users of the skate spot to build an understanding of the different experiences of the same space over time. Whilst we recognised that some skaters embraced the relocation to a skate park, our research was premised on understanding why a significant number of skaters felt so strongly about the importance of the space that they actively resisted relocation and ensured that 150,000 people signed up as members of LLSB. As such the oral histories and interviews were primarily carried out with skaters/members of the campaign, long-time users of the skate spot, as well as with creative professionals involved in documenting the site, including photographers and film makers, some of whom also skated at the Undercroft. In addition to this we interviewed

stakeholders involved in the decision-making processes surrounding the future of the skate spot. In total 25 interviews/oral histories were carried out with a range of people either involved in the campaign or with a deep knowledge of the Undercroft. Furthermore, we also accessed a large body of archival material, from campaign documents, planning documents, skateboard magazines, newspaper articles, photographs, and film that had been generated about the Southbank Undercroft.

Crucially, the research team also wanted to show the experiences and emotions of the Undercroft and the ways in which the skaters interacted with the space to different audiences. We worked in collaboration with a creative arts company, Brazen Bunch, and a long-time Southbank skater and film maker, Winstan Whitter, to produce a twenty-minute film that could convey the experiences of skating at the Undercroft.

Figure 1. ‘You Can’t Move History’ film

Source: <http://www.youthandheritage.com/> This film was awarded the ‘Best Research Film, 2016’ in the Arts and Humanities Research Council ‘Research in Film Awards’.

The award-winning film produced as part of this project is entitled ‘You Can’t Move History’ and is designed to act as a companion to this paper. Whereas this paper presents a sustained analysis of the experiential and emotional values of the Undercroft, the film is designed to allow a sensorial engagement with skating to be experienced as it conveys the sights, sounds, and uses of the space. It must be noted here that participants have been anonymised throughout the paper except where the words are spoken by a participant within the accompanying ‘You Can’t Move History’ film.

### **The Southbank Undercroft**

The Undercroft is known as the ‘oldest recognised and still skated skateboarding space in the world’ ([www.llsb.com/about](http://www.llsb.com/about)) and is located in the supporting structures of the Southbank Centre which comprises the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall Haywood Gallery and Purcell Room and thus is one part a much larger entity. This complex of buildings emerged from the ideas for the Festival of Britain in 1951 to demonstrate the vigour of British architecture following the ravages of World War II.

Despite these origins, and the Undercroft's status as the world's oldest 'recognised' and 'continually skated' skate spot, it did not have listed status and was thus not legally protected from demolition. The latest application to list the complex of buildings that comprise the Southbank Centre was rejected despite the support of Historic England who believed the buildings to be 'Britain's finest collection of post-war public buildings, as impressive and consistent as the Royal Hospital at Greenwich is an English Baroque composition' (LLSB, 2014, 35). The application was refused by the Secretary of State and instead the complex was instead given immunity from listing. That the national listing application was refused is a legacy of the hierarchical system of designation in England in which politicians rather than heritage experts have the final say. In some cases, this protects the future of areas of historic buildings, as with Covent Garden in 1967 and in other cases it ensures development can take place without recourse to the historic values identified by professional heritage experts.

The English system does however allow for local historic significance to be assessed. The Southbank Centre was locally listed by Lambeth Council in March 2010 and remains an integral element of the larger South Bank Conservation Area which was designated in 1982, also by the local authority. Within the English system however local importance does not provide the required legal protection to prevent the loss of the Undercroft. Instead the LLSB campaign team turned towards two relatively new pieces of legislation within the planning sector: Asset of Community Value (ACV) and status as a Village and Town Green (VTG). ACV and VTG recognise the long-term use of space in ways that the Communal Value element of Historic England's *Conservation Principles* cannot. Under an ACV 'community assets can be nominated by parish councils or by groups with a connection to the community' (Sandford, 2017, 3). An ACV is designed to 'give many more communities the opportunity to take control of assets and facilities in their neighbourhoods by levelling the playing field [and] by providing the time for them to prepare a proposal' (DCLG, 2011, 5). In essence, it means that the community has an opportunity to purchase the site should it come up for sale but does not enforce a legal obligation on the seller to sell to the community group. Despite this it was felt that the ACV status could go further by giving

additional weight to the use of the area in the consideration of a planning application, in that we would then be able to argue that a material consideration for Lambeth to take into account was the fact that clearly

this was a use that furthered the social wellbeing of the local community (Participant Ten).

In addition to the ACV status the campaign team also applied for status as a Village or Town Green (VTG) which recognised that ‘local people indulged in lawful sports, and pastimes...for at least 20 years’ (Commons Act, 2006, 7). Lambeth Council rejected the Southbank Centre’s appeal as the Council believed that the ‘significance of the Undercroft as a meeting point for the skateboarders is because it has this ‘home grown’ quality by a reasonably defined group of urban users’ (Lambeth, 2014, 3). The Village Green decision was never resolved legally but was halted when Southbank Centre and LLSB agreed to cease legal procedures in return for the long-term guarantee that the Undercroft would remain open and skateable under a section 106 agreement.

The ability of the planning system to validate the significance of the ‘oldest recognised and still skated skateboarding space in the world’ ([www.llsb.com/about](http://www.llsb.com/about)) as opposed to the invalidation provided through the national heritage system demonstrates anomalies within the built environment sector. However, the ideas behind the Asset of Community Value and Village and Town Green status are similar to those in the Burra Charter, the Faro Convention, and the Quebec Declaration and offer an example of how the heritage and planning sectors could work together to assess the future use of historic spaces. Both the Burra Charter and the ACV/VTG recognise the importance of ‘use’ and that the management of the space should, in the case of the Burra Charter, allow for the ‘continuation of activities and practices which contribute to the cultural significance of place’ (2013, article 7). However, unlike traditional heritage practices, ACV status lasts, in the first instance, for five years, and so enables the fluidity of engagement with spaces to be formally recognised and continually assessed as to their ongoing cultural significance. Further, receiving ACV status does not hold the material fabric hostage to traditional preservation practices of maintenance and restoration but rather legitimises the community-identified spirit of place and acknowledges that a central component of this is fluidity. However Burra Charter, unlike an ACV, remains true to a traditional heritage viewpoint as it suggests there should be ‘minimal change to significant fabric’ (2013, article 7). The sections that follow demonstrate, however, that the continuous change of the Undercroft both enabled skaters to develop their practice and contributed to their profound attachments to the skate spot.

## **Reconceptualising Authenticity: Found Space**

This paper argues that the Undercroft obtained authenticity through lived experience of the space which was captured within the concept of found space. However, as Simon, the LLSB's legal representative acknowledged defining the concept provided a real problem

....it is easy to look at a building and work out why architecturally or historically it's of importance...but the way in which space is used changes subtly over time, and it takes quite a lot to get under the skin of, well...why is it important? ... And the really important thing is, what's so special about this being *found space* rather than something that's been created and why wouldn't a replacement space under the Hungerford Bridge cut it...? (*author italics*)

Put simply, the concept of found space was elusive and distinct from existing evaluations of historic spaces. As such there was confusion surrounding the nature of found space and why it was of central importance to the campaign. Indeed it was only after the Undercroft was threatened that the skaters realised exactly why the skate spot was so important to them: '...you don't think about it (the space) necessarily on a deeper level, but then from the campaign you start to theorise why it is that you like it so much so you can explain that to other people' (Participant Six). This paper now turns to deconstruct three components of found space.

### ***Discovery***

A need to discover, find, or reinterpret existing spaces lies at the heart of the practice of skateboarding. Skateboarding started in post-World War II America as a way to replicate the feeling of surfing (Borden, 2001). Surfers in America found the curved sides of drained swimming pools in the suburban villas of the Los Angeles hills could satiate their senses. Over time, the search for an adrenaline rush spread to urban areas and in particular the spaces and material forms of Modernist architecture. The Southbank Centre was seen as a place whereby 'English kids' could try to 'emulate' the experience of skating that were seen in the 'amazing images' shown in 'American magazines' that showed 'guys riding inclines and slopes' (Participant Nine).

The Southbank Undercroft was never designed for skateboarding and was instead discovered by skaters who felt they were 'the people who actually seek out the useless areas of concrete they (architects) leave around' (*The Guardian*, 12 March 1989). The 'banks' of the Undercroft were viewed by skaters as 'perfect to replicate the waves' and

showed that skating was not seen as a sport but rather an ‘art form’ that was about ‘interpreting your environment and finding new ways to interact with it’ (Participant Two). The perceived authenticity of the Undercroft was directly connected therefore to the appropriation of the materiality by the skaters

...you can’t create what is The Undercroft and the South Bank area, it can never be created ‘cause it wasn’t created in the beginning, because it was a space that was built as a car park that ended up being disused and nobody using a dead space and then some people found an alternative use which is perfect for skating, for BMX-ing and things.

Participant One

This appropriation was not, however, just restricted to 1973 when the space was first found but rather the spirit of continually re-interpreting their environment that had first motivated the surfers was sustained at the Undercroft. This ability to read, decode, and interpret an environment that wasn’t designed for skating was inadvertently strengthened during a perceived war of ‘attrition’ between skaters and the Southbank Centre (Participant Eight).

The Southbank Centre owned and maintained the space throughout and at times the activities of the skaters clashed with those of the other activities hosted by the Centre. Skaters recalled a number of strategies that were initiated to disrupt skating (LLSB, 2015b, 9-17). These included dropping gravel and stones on the space as well as watering the concrete slabs and reducing the Undercroft to a third of its original space. However, rather than reducing the desire to skate, these barriers enabled the skaters to continually reinterpret the physical spaces of the Undercroft

There was loads of banks that we skated, different heights everywhere and they put all these iron railings in front of all of them. It kind of stopped us skating the most interesting parts of the spot, and then it kind of reduced skating... So that was where we progressed to skate more, then we ended up skating the stairs more and we ended up skating the big banks more as well, which are still here today.

Participant One

These strategies to disrupt skating in effect helped skaters to both improve their craft as ‘people started then jumping over the barriers from the top level’ and to increase their enjoyment of the space ‘...and that was a great thing to see’ (Participant One). In 2004 the Southbank Centre also supported this need for discovery through their partnership with Rich Holland’s collective ‘The Side Effects of Urethane’ and their provision of skateable structures in the Undercroft. The Undercroft was therefore seen as offering ‘the

same amount to each generation’ (Participant Five) due to its capacity for continual discovery.

This need for discovery is also witnessed with the collaborative working relationship developed between the Long Live Southbank campaign and the Southbank Centre (<http://www.llsbdonate.com>) since the section 106 agreement was signed. This relationship is based on a recognition that restoring the Undercroft to the size ‘as found in 1973’ is crucial to the ongoing evolution of the space. Two thirds of the original space is currently behind hoardings and is deemed to have ‘a special significance of its own’ due to the ‘legendary *small banks*...along with the *bank to wall*, made famous by American pros’ (LLSB, 2015b, 31). In addition restoring the Undercroft back to its original size was thought to ‘reignite the full potential of the found space’ (LLSB, 2015b, 38). Going back to the future in this instance is a further example of the need to preserve and evolve the relationship between the skaters and the Undercroft.

### ***Embodied Experiences***

‘The brutalist architecture is of great value to many, but equally important is the intangible heritage of feelings, memories, atmosphere and many more things that one cannot quite put a finger on’

Participant Six

The desire to continually interpret the environment was inextricably connected to the feel of skateboarding – a term used by UNESCO in their consideration of authenticity. From the surfers who wanted to replicate the feel of riding the waves to the skaters who sought out challenging spaces, the need for mental, physical, and sensorial stimulation was paramount. The Undercroft was seen as stimulating the ‘creative mind of the skateboarder’ (Jason) as the skaters continually sought to engage with their environment and find new ‘tricks’ which were not seen as the goal of skateboarding but rather they were seen as both the ‘vocabulary’, and the ‘language’ through which they were able to ‘interpret our environment’ (Henry). A deep knowledge of the Undercroft was ingrained through the continual use of the space as the skaters knew ‘instinctively’ where the ‘cracks are, where the drain covers are, where there is a slightly raised paving slab’ (Participant Six). This knowledge helped them to develop tricks and embedded a profound connection between the skaters and physical spaces. These connections were not transitory but rather were deeply embedded in the memory of the interviewees



(I can remember) ...it as a space and an atmosphere, I know exactly...I can remember the space exactly as it existed in its entirety, because I traversed it so many times, but it's just the atmosphere of it...

Participant Nine

This recollection of one of the earlier generations of skaters was matched by a further skater as he could still remember the 'feel of it' as he was 'flying out of the banks as high as you can or hitting the banked wall trying to see how high you can get on that' (Participant One). One of the skaters took this mental recollection further to imply that his body also remembered the space as he explained that the spaces of the Undercroft are 'integrated with my muscle memory, the things I feel and I can feel skating there from miles away' (Jason). The skaters had all skated other places but considered these feelings and experiences to be unique to the Undercroft.

Whilst a rich sensory environment was evoked by the skaters' recollections of the Undercroft, sound was the most dominant sense. A number of skaters, both young and old, talked about the 'noise that comes with those kinds of places, the way the noise reverberates around in that enclosed... with that low ceiling' (Participant Nine). The unique feeling of skating the Undercroft was developed by the aural environment as one of the contemporary generation believed that 'people can tell you exactly the way it sounds...' but 'nowhere sounds like the Southbank' (Jason). These were not momentary or fleeting recollections but rather deeply held visceral reactions to a space that were embedded in the memory, both mind and body, of the skaters. The found space of the Undercroft did not just exist in the nostalgic memory of an imagined skate spot but rather was ingrained within the sensory experience of the continually challenging space. This combination ensured an intimate relationship between individual skaters and the Undercroft developed as they learned to traverse the terrain of the skate spot.

Similarly, the perceived sensorial environment of the skate park was used as a way to inauthenticate the design proposals. Skate parks were deemed to have 'no vibe' (Participant Seven) and it was stated that the feeling of skating Southbank is 'completely different to the feeling of skating a skate park' (Louis). Skaters stated that you 'couldn't move the vibe' nor could you 'recreate the scene...and the whole vibe that has been accumulated over forty years as the heart of British skateboarding' (Bexx, 2013). This vibe related to the unique atmosphere that existed within the vortex that was the

Undercroft and was strongly connected to the sensorial experiences of the space. Sound, was again evoked by the skaters, but this time to inauthenticating the proposed skate park: ‘a fundamental flaw (in the proposed location of the Hungerford skate park) was the noise factor of the high volume of trains. Anyone who knows anything about skateboarding would know how important being able to hear other skateboarders around you is’ (LLSB, 2015a) Recreating the feel, sound, and atmosphere of the Undercroft was thus deemed impossible by the LLSB campaign members

However, despite this recognition, proponents of the new skate park mobilised other examples of skate parks being built and used and even the relocated ‘Big O’ in Montreal which was ‘celebrated as a victory for skateboarders’ (Borden in Lombard, 2015, 100). This tunnel, was originally *found* by Canadian skaters and like the Undercroft was believed by the skaters to be ‘overwhelmingly mystical. It was just too perfect’ (Walsh, 2013). Although the relocation was contentious it did ensure that, to a large extent, the key components of atmosphere, feel, and history could be maintained within the relocated skate spot. Relocation is a common process but recent examples of sports stadia demonstrate that the embodied experiences and emotional attachments, of both players and fans, cannot often be easily replicated. Indeed, West Ham United’s move to the London Stadium has resulted in a difficult adjustment period as the new stadium couldn’t replicate the

atmosphere, the seething mass of people, the tension in the air, sometimes it left visiting teams defeated before they arrived. You could feel the breath of the fans, they were that close. You could hear every word they shouted at you... now, the fans seem miles away from the pitch and they seem to be disenchanted with the new experience

*The Mirror*, 25 September 2016

The material fabric of the stadium, just as with the Big O, and the Undercroft are important considerations yet it was the visceral relationship developed within the physical space that the campaigners wanted to preserve. For the campaigners’ physical relocation to a purpose-built skate park would irrevocably disrupt their relationship to the Undercroft and therefore could not be countenanced.

### **Emotional Attachments to the Undercroft**

Whilst experience of place is important Johnson believes that we need to ‘distinguish between the *primary experience* of place which triggers an immediate, emotional and

unreflective response, and the more reflective processes which, over time, lead to attachment' (1992,12). The attachment to the 'modern day heritage site' (Participant Fifteen) was not as a static marker to a completed history but rather was an active process based on the cumulative experiences of the Undercroft: '...you can put a room full of history about Southbank, but it's not about that, because that's finished, that's it - that's a picture on the wall. But the ongoing process is what matters, the evolution of it' (Domas). The skaters were emotionally attached to the Undercroft as a result of the cumulative experiences of the skate spot which had turned the spot into the 'Mecca' of skateboarding (LLSB, 2014, 50).

These attachments were comprised of a number of different emotions including love, pride, joy, and fear. Although these emotions are presented in this paper as positive and negative binaries, this is more for ease of expression rather than to deny the complexity of emotional attachments and co-existence of positive and negative emotions. Often the skaters juxtaposed what would be conventionally known as positive (love, joy, pride) and negative (fear, anxiety) emotions within the same conversation. Contained within this is a realisation that while a range of emotions can exist at the same time one may be fleetingly more dominant. For example, it is important to note that negative emotions were mobilised as part of the campaign to ensure that the positive emotional expressions of love, joy and pride could assume dominance within the campaigners' rhetoric of resistance. Emotional reactions to historic spaces are thus complex and multi-layered yet a textual analysis of the words and phrases used along with the physical actions of campaigning reveal why experience and emotion were an inextricable aspect of the belief that you can't move history.

The skaters repeatedly demonstrated their love for the space. The LLSB campaign team's own Cultural and Heritage Assessment Report stated that the 'existing fabric has been cherished and loved by the users' (2014, 48). For example, the skaters talked of how their 'lives were shaped by the space' in which they were 'surrounded by this amazing architecture' which other people said was 'really brutal and banal' but that they had 'grown to love it' (Winstan). Love was a recurring theme within the interviews as a different skater talked of their 'great familiarity with the architecture' and how this bred a positive attachment to the Undercroft: 'from love comes familiarity and from familiarity comes love' (Participant Six).

Participants each expressed their pride in being able to skate the Undercroft. This was twofold: firstly, the history of the site was a consistent source of pride and their position as central to UK skateboarding was particularly evocative of this. Secondly, their pride was also related to what might be termed associative value as the Undercroft had produced ‘four world champions of slalom’ who ‘learnt their skills and developed their talents here’ (Participant Five). Pride was closely related to respect, both for the skaters and also for the architectural forms that had enabled the skaters to become world champions. Indeed, this pride and respect was demonstrated through the LLSB teams continual use of the architectural pillars as a motif throughout the campaign

I think that people seem to really respect the logo, I mean actually the logo is literally the pillars in there, the pillars are a really integral part of the whole space so it’s just showing it again in its purest form.

Participant Eleven

The pillars became the reference point of the campaign and were seen across the LLSB blog, social media pages, and merchandise as well as being incorporated on the official letters sent by the campaign team. The iconic design of the pillars, venerated by architectural historians, was matched by the affection for them by the members of LLSB.

The joy of skating the space was consistently referenced by the skaters who felt the space was ‘loads funner’ (Participant Six) although, in an instance of the juxtaposition of positive and negative language, they recognised that the ‘structure itself doesn’t lend itself to be somewhere that’s particularly friendly, it’s a difficult building, it’s brutal architecture but it had a life. It’s just got a sense of freedom’ (Participant Eleven). The experience of skating thus ingrained a deep sense of attachment to the physical fabric yet the skaters were not protective over maintaining the purity of the space, contrary to traditional heritage practices concerning restoration and maintenance. Rather they were attached to the dents, marks, and scratches in the surfaces of the Undercroft. They did not see the marks as a negative consequence of skating but rather a crucial part of exploring the space which helped to deepen the relationship between the practice of skateboarding and the physical form of the Undercroft. Indeed, the stones were thought to carry the cultural memory of the previous generations of skateboarders: ‘...in the stones itself there is marks of tricks that people have done that nobody even remembers anymore, but that somebody might have saw, that never left them’ (Jason). The stones were seen as the

transmitter of joy and their unsanitised existence was crucial to maintaining the authenticity of the skate spot.

Fourthly and finally, the fear of losing the spaces, complete with the dents, marks, and scratches, was evident and helped to draw out the previously latent and hidden meanings of the space. Common across the skaters was a belief that the threat to their existing space had made them confront the possibility of loss. In the abstract loss was seen as usual: ‘...everyone felt that this is just what happens, skate spots have been lost all over the world and it was just one of those’. However, the skaters felt that the reality of impending loss gave rise to an imperative to act: ‘...started to think about what we would actually do with our lives if this place wasn’t here and what an effect it would have on our community that we really started to realise, damn, we have to do something’ (Participant Two). This was supported by an explicit acknowledgement that ‘pretty much the whole skate scene were quite frustrated and anxious about that (loss) happening’ (Participant Twelve). A range of emotions, both positive and negative, derived from the cumulative use of the Undercroft thus underpinned a profound emotional attachment between the campaigners and the skate spot which in turn fuelled their belief that this piece of history could not be moved.

### **Conclusion: The Authenticity of Found Space**

This paper argues embodied experiences of, and emotional attachments to, the Southbank Undercroft were crucial components of found space. In turn, the paper argues that the concept of found space is broadly analogous to authenticity, as defined in a number of international heritage charters. The ‘feel’ of the Undercroft was a central element of why history could not be moved and more broadly opens a discussion on why some historic places are seen as so important that they cannot be replicated or demolished. The paper thus provides empirical evidence that starts to refute the belief that there ‘remains much to learn about how the urban landscape continues to influence the individual experiencing of urban space’ (Adams and Larkham 2015, 2005). Historic urban spaces are uniquely placed to enable this kind of examination as ‘affective and emotional connections to a locale...need time to establish themselves between individual bodies and their surrounding environment’ (Jones and Evans, 2011, 2326). This paper has demonstrated the ways in which generations of skaters developed emotional attachments to the Southbank Undercroft and how these were generated as a result of repeated embodied

experiences within a physical space that enabled sensorial stimulation. These experiences and attachments were seen as so powerful that the campaigners could not countenance the relocation of the skate spot to a skate park 120 metres away.

The concept of found space provides a useful lens to interrogate emerging ideas surrounding the authenticity of heritage sites in two connected ways. Firstly, it incorporates ideas from the Burra Charter, Faro Convention, and Quebec Declaration surrounding the importance of embodied, sensory, and lived experiences as aspects of authenticity. Secondly, it demonstrates that citizen experts possess a form of expertise that helps to understand why people become emotionally invested in what they see as authentic historic spaces. Furthermore, it also suggests that ‘the understanding of the authenticity of a heritage site depends on a comprehensive assessment of the significance of the site by those who are associated with it or who claim it as part of their history (San Antonio, 1996, point 2). In the case of the Undercroft the skaters felt they were the guardians of authenticity and that this was derived from their relationship to the skate spot. One of the skaters summarised this by stating that ‘I’m not a historian, I’m not an architectural student...I’ve been skating it for the last 12 years of time, I know what I’m talking about’ (Participant Five). They recognised that this knowledge was at odds with that situated within the formal heritage and planning sectors but that their familiarity with the space gave them unrivalled expertise. This is not to say that ‘we are all experts’ (Schofield, 2014, 2) capable of determining authenticity but does question whether other forms of expertise provided by citizen experts can provide a ‘deeper understanding’ of the meaning of historic places (San Antonio, 1996, point 4).

However, the findings also raise a number of theoretical and practical questions. On a theoretical level if ‘we are all experts’ then how do you make distinctions between groups of people with competing claims to space? This is a politically charged question with practical consequences for heritage management. For example, the local community in Rebala, Estonia wanted to ‘change their surroundings...as the landscape...did not have high emotional value’ (Vedru, 2011, 60) whereas in Clydebank, Scotland, not everyone wanted to remember the industrial past that was immortalised in the designs for new buildings (Madgin, 2014). If we think of these competing claims in the context of the English heritage sector then what is the role of citizen expertise relative to the established (and legislative) categories of architectural and historic interest? This paper does not

suggest that citizen expertise should be elevated above other forms but neither should it be dismissed as subjective and illegitimate – if nothing else it helps us to better understand the contemporary role of historic places. If, however, we think of these questions in the context of the English planning sector then, how for example, does the system consider felt ownership of spaces in the context of private property rights, the claims of other user groups in the context of multiple, distinct, or overlapping forms of citizen expertise, decide what indeed constitutes citizen expertise, what is a legitimate claim to space, and assess the potential financial burdens placed on community groups. These are all key concerns that need to be considered further as practices of community governance evolve and are tested in law by a number of different cases. If we bring the heritage and planning systems closer together then the ACV and Town and Village Green status do allow for the fluidity of use and contemporary cultural significance to be authenticated in ways that arguably the existing heritage system does not. This then raises the question as to whether spaces like the Undercroft should be administered through the national heritage system and therefore fixed in time and space or whether the cultural significance of use can be recognised through other means.

In conclusion, interrogating the concept of found space exposes the deep relationships that people have with places and in particular exposes a view that runs contrary to western heritage traditions, namely material fabric is not the sole reason for valorisation. Continuing to see authenticity as located within the *existence* of physical fabric without broadening it to consider the social experiences it has *enabled*, and continues to *enable*, betrays the rich attachments that exist between people and historic places. Furthermore, authenticity is not solely determined by professional heritage experts but is also ascribed from below by everyday users of historic spaces whose cumulative experiences give them an intimate knowledge that does not fit easily into the privileged categories of architectural and historic interest. Seeing authenticity in these ways helps us to understand why history could not, in this case, be moved. The Long Live Southbank campaigners were not just fighting to retain the remnants of a material past but rather to ensure they could preserve their relationship with the Undercroft, or put simply, to keep finding their found space.

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