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## AUTHENTICITY MAKES THE CITY

### How “the Authentic” affects the Production of Space

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**Abstract** In this chapter I argue that authenticity *makes* the city by underlying the production of space. Drawing from heritage studies, I define authenticity as a relationship among people, places, and meanings that involves aesthetic and moral judgments. I analyze how this relationship shapes landscapes through the lens of Lefebvre’s trialectics—conceived, perceived, and lived spaces. Interpretations of “the authentic” materialize in the city through both top-down and bottom-up dynamics. While powerful actors produce the conceived spaces of represented authenticity, the city’s users make these dominant landscapes authentic lived spaces through appropriations and significations. These dynamics become apparent in Thames Town, Shanghai’s British-themed village.

### **Our Problem with Authenticity**

We, scholars of urban studies, have a problem with authenticity. One hears the word frequently in discussions of gentrification, urban regeneration, place-making, and ethnic clustering. In most cases, however, our use of the term is elusive. Sometimes we refer to authenticity as an asset, as the possession of an original place or community that needs to be safeguarded. At other times, authenticity is associated with the production of Disneyfied landscapes of consumption, with the control of citizens, and with the exclusion of vulnerable groups. Part of this ambiguity lies in the fact that authenticity is indeed a cryptic concept loaded at once with notions of authority and resistance. Nevertheless, I am convinced that authenticity persists as an omnipresent, if vague, notion in urban studies because we have not yet explored systematically how it actually functions in the city. That is, we have given too little attention to how a city’s users and producers negotiate and construct values of “the authentic” and to how these values determine the physical and social production of space.

I define authenticity as a dynamic relationship among people, places, and meanings, and I contend that this relationship affects the production of space. Following Henri Lefebvre (1991), I understand the production of space to be a process involving three simultaneous dimensions: the conceived or dominant, the perceived or concretely experienced, and the lived or dominated and yet subversive spaces. I argue that authenticity facilitates urban transformation by operating through this conceived-perceived-lived triad. In conceiving the city, dominant actors represent ideas of “the authentic” and produce spaces that favor the attraction of capital, normalize sets of behaviors, and marginalize those who do not look or act in accordance with these norms. At the same time, the users of a city construct their own values of “the authentic” by perceiving, negotiating, and at times contesting the narratives of authenticity represented by powerful actors. Through their daily practices and emotions, these users transform the spaces of conceived and represented authenticity into authentic lived spaces. Authenticity—the moral and aesthetic judgments that it entails—thus determines the production, consumption, and contestation of landscapes.

We must embrace the ambiguities of authenticity in order to reveal its power. Among the different forms of authenticity that one finds in scholarly conversations, I believe that three typologies are crucial to contemporary urban experiences. Moral authenticity is the condition of being—or aspiring to be—true to oneself (Heidegger, 1927); material authenticity refers to the veracity of an artifact and is central to theories and practices of preservation (Jokilehto, 1995); finally, symbolic authenticity is what consumers seek through the experience of images and places (Knudsen and Waade, 2010). While there are differences among them, all three types of authenticity involve an unresolved tension between permanence and change. The word “authentic” invokes ideas of identity, genuineness, and originality. We find ourselves especially concerned with such ideas when the world we inhabit undergoes sudden change. The more things are transformed around us, the more we instinctively care for them. We long for what is gone, even if it never existed in the way in which we remember it. It is not surprising, then, that philosophical preoccupations with “the authentic” emerged in tandem with socio-economic transformations in modern Europe. In Western contexts, the copy, as opposed to “the authentic,” has acquired a negative connotation since the Medieval period, when a need for sincerity supported an emergent ethics of truth and the moral condemnation of fakery (Trilling, 1972). As Tate and Shannon have explained in the introduction of this volume, during the Enlightenment the quest for authenticity further evolved becoming “one of the most politically explosive of modern impulses” (Berman, 1970, p. xxvii).

Authenticity has also emerged, especially in the past three decades, as a potent branding tool that motivates consumers and favors the attraction of capital in the experience economy. A desire to feel the “real” is not surprising in an age of perceived uncertain belongings, shifting identities, and increasing homogeneity (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gilmore and Pine, 2007). Equally unsurprising is that individuals’ quest for “the authentic” drives the production, consumption, and contestation of landscapes. Urban sociologist Sharon Zukin has explained this phenomenon with unparalleled clarity. Authenticity, she argues, involves both mechanisms of hegemonic dominance and practices of resistance. On the one hand, authenticity is a category of aesthetic judgment that controls citizens by reinforcing dominant narratives of growth. Power actors capitalize on people’s quest for the authentic. They produce symbolic landscapes that both satisfy citizens/consumers by offering safe versions of urban life and control them by normalizing sets of “appropriate” behaviors. On the other hand, claims of authenticity can also further the demand for “a right to the city, a human right, that is cultivated by long time residence, use, and habit” (Zukin, 2010, p. 244). This occurs, for example, when ethnic minorities or activists use the notion of authenticity to “preserve group solidarity, prevent displacement and ease inter-group tensions” (Zukin, 2009, p. 545).

The ambivalence of authenticity—together a force of hegemonic control and a liberating apparatus of resistance—manifests itself in the city. Urbanists are increasingly aware of this phenomenon. Japonica Brown-Saracino (2009), for example, has demonstrated that diverse groups of gentrifiers care for the authenticity of the places that they inhabit in divergent ways. While some individuals—the “social preservationists”—are particularly concerned about the authentic social ties of “old timers,” others—the “pioneers”—are interested mainly in preserving a neighborhood’s appearance, even at the cost of marginalizing its original residents. Ahmed Ouf (2001) has examined how preservation and urban design, though often associated in practice, involve conflicting notions of authenticity. Whereas heritage preservationists safeguard the material originality of monuments and sites, urban designers fabricate the authenticity of historical places ad hoc by featuring the built environment with symbolic décor and layouts. The fabrication of an “authentic” atmosphere equally facilitates the commodification of ethnic neighborhoods. Jan Rath (2007) has observed that while usually it is the city managers who construct the authenticity of ethnic enclaves as part of efforts to boost the tourism industry, sometimes it is the original residents who capitalize on their own identity, consciously performing their culture so as to match visitors’ expectations.

It has thus been established that authenticity, with all of its values and ambiguities, underlies urban phenomena such as gentrification, preservation, and place making. But seeing this link is not enough. We need to understand the mechanisms through which authenticity functions in a city if we wish to illuminate its social and political implications. As a step toward this understanding, I draw on the literature of heritage and tourism studies to look closely at the role that authenticity plays in our everyday experiences. Since the 2000s, scholars of tourism and heritage have progressively agreed that we should understand authenticity not as a finite quality, but as a relational, dynamic, practice-related condition that individuals establish within themselves and with the world around them. This interpretation—of authenticity as a process rather than as a fixed attribute—lies at the basis of my argument that authenticity makes the city by affecting the physical and social production of space. Before I explain these dynamics, in the next section I discuss the ways in which discourses in preservation and tourism studies have approached the notion of authenticity over the past three decades.

### **Shifting Values of Authenticity**

Beginning in the 1970s, academic conversations about heritage and tourism defined authenticity through two opposing approaches that the editors of this book have also discussed: objectivism and constructivism. While the former holds that only original artifacts are authentic, the latter approach sees authenticity as a social construct that depends on the cultural lens of the observer. Objectivism had its conceptual roots in the modern condemnation of copies and in a diffuse skepticism regarding the “culture industry” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). Walter Benjamin (1936) gave voice to this skepticism in his critique of mechanical reproductions. In his view, no industrial copy can approximate the value of an original artefact, whose authentic aura is linked to the *hic et nunc* of its production. Following this view, objectivists understood authenticity as an inherent, non-negotiable, and verifiable property that cannot be falsified or reproduced. Modern preservation theories are based on this objectivist interpretation of authenticity. It is well known that modern societies established a rupture with previous civilizations (Koselleck, 2004) and came to interpret the past as a “foreign country” that can be both conserved and consumed (Lowenthal, 1985). Increasingly since the nineteenth century, nation-states have reinforced their power by emphasizing—and at times inventing—selected parts of their history (Hobsbawm & Terrence, 1983), thus profiting from what Robert Hewison described as the “heritage industry” (1987).

During the nineteenth century, European architects and art historians took upon themselves the task of transmitting the material witnesses of history to future generations (Jokilehto, 1999).<sup>i</sup> So it was that, in 1931, the Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments institutionalized historic preservation as a scientific discipline of international interest.<sup>ii</sup> The widespread devastation of World War II made manifest the need for an international, normative framework to protect heritage sites. The 1964 International Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, the so-called Venice Charter, instituted the protocols that most preservationists continue to follow today (Icomos, 1964). The charter established the “common responsibility” of governments to safeguard “ancient monuments” and hand them on to future generations “in the full richness of their authenticity” (p. 1). In this context, authenticity was strictly dependent on the material originality of a given monument. The preservation guidelines stipulated that no intervention could be done unless it remained reversible and visible. In order both to avoid deceiving the observer and to respect the historical and artistic authenticity of an artifact, the guidelines held that reconstructions and integrations should be distinguishable from the authentic and original parts of the monument (Brandi, 1963). By the late 1970s, cultural properties could be listed in the World Heritage List only if they met the “Test of Authenticity.” Still today, this test determines whether artifacts are genuine in terms of location, design, materials, use and function, traditions and techniques, and spirit and feeling (Stovel, 1995). The World Heritage guidelines normalized the objectivist understanding of authenticity worldwide, and also had the practical implication of popularizing conservation practices that privilege safeguarding the physicality of heritage rather than its cultural implications (Kuutma, 2012; Smith, 2006).

The idea that authenticity can never be imitated also informed early debates in tourism studies. Daniel Boorstin (1961), for example, criticized modern mass tourism on the grounds that it offers surrogate versions of authentic cultures and places. In his nostalgic critique of the vulgarization of high culture, Boorstin asserted that contemporary tourists were passive consumers who experienced pseudo-events with neither the will nor the intellectual capacity to liberate themselves from the trap of a simulated society. Dean MacCannell offered a more nuanced version of Boorstin’s perspective by introducing the classic notion of “staged authenticity” (1973, 1976). For MacCannell, tourists, rather than being passive subjects, are alienated modern individuals who seek their true self through the experience of “an Other” culture. Drawing on Erving Goffman’s analysis of social life (1959), MacCannell maintained that contemporary tourism experiences are organized in terms of front and back regions: when tourists visit a destination they want to experience both the front region,

which they expect to be arranged in order to satisfy their expectations, and the back region, where they hope for more authentic encounters with native peoples and cultures. MacCannell argued that whatever their efforts, however, tourists are inevitably deceived because they end up visiting staged front and back regions that simulate, but cannot deliver, authenticity.

In contrast with the objectivists, adherents of constructivism have argued that authenticity “is in practice never absolute, always relative” (Lowenthal, 1995, p. 123). In their view, authenticity depends on the interpretation of the observer rather than on the material originality of an artifact. Both the Nara Document on Authenticity (Icomos, 1994) and the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) incorporated the constructivist shift in the discipline of heritage preservation. Scholars in the 1990s contested the World Heritage’s exclusive focus on material authenticity on the grounds that such focus privileged a Western-based approach to the exclusion of other traditions. Acknowledging the need for a broader understanding of cultural diversity, the Nara Document acknowledged that it is “not possible to base judgements of (...) authenticity within fixed criteria” (art. 11). This consideration also pushed scholars—especially in folklore studies—to expand the scope of heritage encompassing non-material components. Thus the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage acknowledged that practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills determine the authenticity of heritage as much as, and at times even more than, its materiality (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Kuutma, 2015; Munjeri, 2004).

The relevance of the Nara Document and the Convention on Intangible Heritage becomes evident when we consider how preservation discourses and practices in Asian contexts diverge from the European-centered norm. In most East-Asian regions, where historic buildings are built in wood, structures are preserved through the complete substitution of their material components. It is the visual integrity, rather than the physical substance, that makes artifacts “authentic.” Japanese shrines have been regularly dismantled and built anew for centuries. In the Japanese language, two words together approximate the term authenticity as commonly understood in Western contexts: genuineness and reliability. Japanese preservationists believe that complete reconstructions conserve these two qualities. Rebuilding not only ensures that the original design of the restored artifact remains consistent with the original, but it also guarantees the transmission of technical expertise from one generation to the next (Ito, 1995). Complete reconstructions are also diffused in the Chinese context, where the government’s attention to heritage preservation has grown exponentially over the past two decades. If preservationists acknowledge that their task

is “restoring the old as it was” (*xinjū rǐjū*), the notion of authenticity that corresponds to such task has little to do with the original materiality of heritage. The Qufu Declaration, a restoration chart that Chinese preservationists elaborated in 2005, admits complete reconstructions as long as rebuilding is executed with “original” techniques, procedures, and materials. The ex-novo construction of buildings that copy—more or less accurately—ancient structures is a much-diffused practice in China. The fact that entire villages are built from scratch does not impede Chinese practitioners or visitors to appreciate the “authenticity” or “historicity” of the new heritage (Weiler, 2016; Zhu, 2016).

In tourism studies, since the 1980s constructivists have insisted that authenticity could not be defined by universal criteria because it depends entirely on the appreciation of the beholders. This view draws on postmodern arguments that simulation and hyper-reality have replaced traditional orders in contemporary societies, thereby making impossible, or meaningful, the distinction between what is “real” and what is “fake” (Baudrillard, 1994; Eco, 1986). Rejecting a positivist interpretation of the world, constructivists argued that tourists construct and negotiate values of authenticity on the basis of their beliefs and expectations. As conscious subjects, tourists are able to elaborate their own interpretations of the authentic. It is the very experience of places and people, the ritual experience of tourism (Grabrun, 1983), that allows individuals to develop sentiments regarding authenticity. From this perspective, even staged locations or reproductions can *become* authentic in the eyes of observers who attribute meanings and values through their physical and emotional experiences (Bruner, 2001; Cohen, 1988; Pearce and Moscardo, 1986; Redfoot, 1984).

Since the early 2000s, the polarized conversations about objective and constructed authenticity have progressively merged. Scholars agree that either approach alone offers only a partial interpretation of authenticity. Objectivists assign too much importance to the materiality of objects and underestimate the intangible components that inform individuals’ appreciation of authenticity. Constructivists, on the other hand, neglect the importance of physicality in tourist experiences when they argue that the values associated with authenticity are unrelated to the concrete experience of places and objects. Rejecting dichotomist approaches, critics increasingly concede that the “ineffable, almost magical, power of authenticity” (Jones, 2010 p. 181) lies precisely in its status as a cultural construct that is *also* profoundly entangled in the materiality of the world (Holtorf, 2013). The acknowledgement that authenticity is both culturally situated and physically rooted has freed scholars from the obligation to define the concept. Researchers in the fields of tourism and heritage have at last realized that decades of debates over what should and should not be considered

authentic have distracted them from considering the more compelling socio-political implications of authenticity (Vannini, 2011).

In other words, rather than discussing what authenticity *is*, scholars now agree that it is more useful to look at what authenticity *does*. Ning Wang's (1999) notion of "existential authenticity" marked a shift in this direction. Wang defined authenticity as a "potential state of being" that individuals activate when they experience the liminality of tourist experiences. Although perceptions of authenticity "often have nothing to do with the issue of whether toured objects are real" (p. 359), these perceptions are nonetheless ingrained in individuals' experiences of the world. Many scholars follow Wang in understanding authenticity as a state of being and focus on how individuals activate such state through physical practices. Britta Timm Knudsen and Anne Marit Waade (2010), for example, have argued that it is the encounter between people and objects, the performance that unfolds through corporeal and affective practices, that leads to the construction of authenticity. For them, "performative authenticity" is a relationship that "has to do with what happens in between" individuals and the objects and places that they experience (p. 12). While gazes, expectations, and imaginations play substantial roles in forming values of "the authentic," the role of the corporeal dimension is equally important. Knudsen and Waade argue that individuals both produce and are produced by performative authenticity. Not only do we "do and perform places through our actions," but "places are something we authenticate through our emotional/affective/sensuous relatedness to them" (p. 13).

## **Authenticity and the production of space**

Authenticity, then, is more than a finite quality. It is a relational, dynamic, practice-related condition that emerges when individuals engage with the world around them. Perceptions of authenticity exert an influence that extends far beyond experiences of tourism: they inform our "everyday assessments of social worth" (Pearce and Moscardo, 1986, p. 122). When individuals share ideas of "the authentic," they establish systems of aesthetic and moral judgments. These systems influence the ways in which societies interpret "cultural authenticity"—what represents or does not represent the identity of a group. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and increasingly over the past three decades, cultural authenticity has become "such convenient fodder" that it now underlies "political debates on race, ethnicity, gender, and multiculturalism" and affects policy-making around the world (Bendix, 1997, p. 9). In a city, the sets of values enabled and sustained by the notion of authenticity profoundly impact the production of space.

We have learned from Henri Lefebvre (1991) that every society “produces a space, its own space” (p. 31). This space is as concrete as it is abstract. While material forms may be considered as given, their meanings, organizations, and uses are always socially mediated. Spatial and social relationships are thus inter-dependent in the production of space, which includes its physical organization as well as the dynamic arrangement of social, cultural, and political ties. As a dynamic process, the production of space involves the three simultaneous dimensions of *conceived*, *perceived*, and *lived* spaces. *Conceived* space is “the dominant space of any society” (pp. 38-39) that involves the representations of space: the mental and creative constructions that architects, urbanists, and scientists conceptualize using pure symbols and rules. *Perceived* space corresponds to the “particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” that people experience daily through spatial practices (p. 33). *Lived* space is the realm of “users” and “inhabitants.” Including and expanding the perceived and the conceived, the lived dimension is the “dominated space” that “the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (p. 39). The space described by the conceived-perceived-lived triad cannot be treated as “a thing among other things, nor a product among other products.” Rather, Lefebvre urges us to consider space as an *oeuvre*, an ever-changing work that “subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity” (p. 73).

Borrowing from Lefebvre’s analysis, I argue that authenticity underlies and reinforces the duplicity of space, which is at once socially produced and productive of social relationships. I understand urban authenticity as a dynamic relationship involving people, places, and meanings that generates urban transformations. As a productive force, authenticity unites the conceived, perceived, and lived dimensions of space. In other words, authenticity underlies the production of space affecting both top-down and bottom-up dynamics. The formers materialize in the conceived spaces of a city. Dominant actors produce spaces that have been aesthetically and symbolically edited in order to represent a sense of authenticity. Developers, architects, and planners build environments intended to convey dominant ideas of “the authentic” and fulfill consumers’ expectations. This occurs, for example, when historic urban fabrics are packaged to become “touristic bubbles” that convey the sense of an authentic past (Judd, 1999), when themed enclaves provide the immersive experience of an authentic exoticness (Sorkin, 1992), when ethnic enclaves commodify the aesthetics and cultural legacies of an authentic “Other” (Hackworth and Rekers, 2005), or, finally, when the “entrepreneurial spaces” of alternative consumption practices offer an “aura of authenticity” giving consumers the opportunity to “perform difference” (Zukin, 2008). The political intentions and, when not successfully

contested, implications of these conceived spaces of authenticity are hegemonic and exclusionary. Representing dominant ideas of “the authentic” these spaces favor the attraction of capital, establish normalizing sets of behaviors that control citizen/consumer, and marginalize those who do not look or act in accordance with those norms (Kohn, 2004; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, 1998).

At the same time, however, the users of the conceived spaces of authenticity are not passive consumers. To the contrary, they construct their own values of “the authentic” through quotidian spatial practices—by negotiating, re-signifying, and at times contesting the dominant representations of authenticity. By sensing and using the built environment, a city’s users transform the conceived spaces of represented authenticity into authentic lived spaces. In some cases, individuals resist dominant narratives of authenticity through organized dissent. An example of this phenomenon is the series of public protests that took place in Seattle, Long Beach, Anaheim, and Haymarket in Virginia when groups of institutional actors and citizens opposed and ultimately changed Disney’s plans for their cities (Warren, 1994, 2005). Organized dissent also changed the rules in Celebration, Florida, a residential community developed by Disney and minutely designed to represent an “authentic” American city. A prescriptive list of behaviors and maintenance rules ensures that the atmosphere remains faithful to the represented authenticity of Celebration. However, residents’ ideas of “the authentic” collided with the city’s regulations. Through organized protests, Celebration’s residents convinced the City to adjust the rules according to their will (Ross, 1999).

Users also reify, negotiate, or subvert conceived narratives of authenticity through quotidian uses and tactical appropriations. Spaces mean different things to different people. Scholars of urbanism have told us that we negotiate, produce, and resist the meanings of the built environment by walking, acting, and sensing the city (Chase et al. 1999; De Certeau, 1984). Through contingent appropriations and significations, we transform the city into a locus “outside bureaucratic systematization” that provides us with “realms for fantasy and desire, for rebellion and assertion” (McLeod, 1997, 214). Researchers in heritage and tourism have linked these dynamics with conversations on authenticity. They have proved that not even the staged enclaves of the most visited destinations remain exempt from disorder and unpredictability (Bagnall, 2003). Through their bodily and affective practices, tourists challenge the existence of a single, dominant narrative of “the authentic.” The experience of place—an arena that incorporates agency, identities, and contestation—allows tourists to feel, think, and rethink new and at times conflicting values of authenticity (Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Zhu, 2012).

## The Case of Thames Town, Shanghai

Themed environments are ideal settings to investigate how authenticity affects the production of space through both policy, and every day, lived experience. In my own work, I have demonstrated that although themed settings are produced as dominant spaces of represented authenticity, they become authentic lived spaces through the users' everyday activities and emotions (Piazzoni, 2018). A themed setting is spatially and semantically organized around an overarching motif. This motif, which developers and architects usually draw from the repertoire of popular culture, conveys the atmosphere of an exotic "Other"—another time, place, or culture (Hannigan, 2010).

Originating in postwar America, the theme park has developed into a standardized model of urban design (Gottdiener, 1997). Increasingly and throughout the world, powerful actors brand cities by producing readymade, prepackaged, themed "places" (Bryman, 2004). Most scholars disapprove of theming arguing that it produces a fake, exclusionary, and controlling city. These critics contend that themed settings not only provide a filtered urban experience (Boddy, 1992; Huxtable, 1997), but they also enable mechanisms of control by integrating consumption, repression, and exclusion (Boyer, 1993; Sorkin, 1992; Soja, 1992).

However, themed environments are much more than uniform spaces of hegemonic control. Through their appropriations and significations, the users of themed city make the spaces of represented authenticity authentic lived spaces. I have explored these dynamics looking at Thames Town, an English-themed village built in Songjiang New Town within the One City, Nine Towns Shanghai City Plan (2001-2005). The plan organized the Shanghai metropolitan area with ten new urban centers, each themed after a European country (Den Hartog, 2010). Designed by the British Atkins consultancy group, Thames Town extends over less than half a mile and includes a mixed-use downtown surrounded by six gated residential communities. The Gothic church, Tudor- and Victorian-style buildings, red phone boxes, and statues of famous British characters—i.e. Winston Churchill and Lady Diana—give the village an allegedly quintessentially British allure.

Thames Town is at once a popular touristic destination, an affluent residential community, a city of migrants, and a ghost town. Although very diverse groups of people use the village at the same time, they hardly overlap in space. The core of downtown, where the British theme is more apparent, is an important center for the Shanghai wedding photography industry. Professional photographers portray daily capture dozens of engaged couples in a variety of matching outfits—the princess and

the prince, the “classic” Western bride and groom, the Mao’s Red Guards. Tourists visit the same areas of Thames Town in order to both enjoy the British atmosphere and comment the extravagant styles of the future brides and grooms.

Beyond its “English” crowded center, however, Thames Town remains semi-empty. Only a quarter of the ten thousand projected inhabitants lives in the village. Occupancy is low because most owners purchased properties as a form of investment and never moved in town. While the gated communities are about half full, most downtown condominiums remain vacant. Squatting migrant workers employed in the local construction business are the almost exclusive residents of these downtown condominiums. In China it is common practice for construction workers to inhabit the units that they renovate. However, in Thames Town most workers occupy the vacant units downtown because the residents do not want to see the migrants within the gated communities outside of working hours.

Through observation, surveys, and interviews, I explored how the presence of the Thames Town’s British theme affects the personal and spatial relationships among and within the diverse users’ groups—residents, visitors, engaged couples, and floating migrant workers. My fieldwork demonstrated that the symbolism of the built environment and the ways in which users interpret ideas of authenticity influence how individuals behave in space. On the one hand, the Britishness of the town triggers the enthusiasm of visitors and residents. For example, some residents consciously play with the theme furnishing their houses with a very traditional Chinese décor while others choose an English style and appropriate Western symbols—Christmas decorations, Catholic items, and British TV characters. On the other hand, visitors and residents abstain from acting in ways that they believe to be inappropriate. In order to not spoil the British atmosphere, most tourists avoid sitting or eating unless they find equipment designated for those activities. Further safeguarding the English appearance, most residents restrain from hanging the laundry outside—a common practice in China.

The presence of the British theme also has exclusionary implications. Most residents, who confine themselves in the gated communities avoiding other people in town, also ask the guards to reprimand anyone who spoils the British atmosphere. This policy de facto marginalizes the migrant construction workers. In most gated communities, the workers are restricted from cooking, hanging washing, or even sitting outside the units that they renovate. The residents tolerate the migrants only in the areas immediately outside the gated communities and in the semi-deserted areas downtown—where visitors do not go because the British theme is less apparent. For

most migrant workers, of whom some live with children, the “authentic Britishness” of Thames Town connotes a sense of exclusion and control.

And yet, Thames Town is not a space of ubiquitous repression as many rules are broken, flaunted and unenforced. For example, couples who cannot afford to pay a wedding salon use the downtown sidewalks like dressing rooms and typically ignore the guards who ask them to move. Some guards also violate the very rules that they are expected to enforce. A few of them occupy the vacant units downtown along with the migrant workers that they are supposed to remove or sleep in the porters’ lodge built at the entrance of each gated area. Guards also participate in the informal night markets that take place in front of the gated areas providing the migrant workers with food and necessities.

Thames Town thus includes many different places: the crowded themed core, the exclusive gated communities, the occupied units downtown, and the informal gatherings of migrant workers. These seemingly antithetical spaces share a similarity: they are the spaces that authenticity makes. That is, the physical and social production of these spaces is contingent with how both their dominant creators—politicians, developers, and designers—and the people who use the village—residents, tourists, and employees—interpret and negotiate ideas of authenticity. In other words, the ways in which people understand and react to the constructed authenticity of Thames Town transform the village into an authentic place that is unique in space and time.

## **Conclusions**

People’s desire to live and experience “the authentic” affects how cities are produced, consumed, and contested around the world. As scholars of urbanism, we are increasingly aware of this fact. Yet, we remain puzzled by what authenticity is and how it relates to space. Is authenticity a positive quality to be safeguarded, or is it a label under which power actors create exclusionary landscapes of consumption? I am convinced not only that it is both, but that it is precisely this ambiguity that makes authenticity a powerful force that intervenes holistically in the production of space. Scholars in heritage and tourism encourage us to understand authenticity as a process, a link that relates people to the world that they inhabit. Drawing from these conversations, I have defined authenticity as a dynamic relationship between people, places, and meanings. I argue that authenticity *makes* the city by underlying the conceived, perceived, and lived dimensions of the production of space. The systems of moral and aesthetic judgments that people associate with “the authentic” materialize in the city through both top-down and bottom-up dynamics. Power actors use the

aesthetics of authenticity to produce, sell, and control the conceived landscapes of represented authenticity. At the same time, a city's users construct their own values of "the authentic" by negotiating and possibly contesting dominant narratives. Physically and symbolically engaging with the built environment, individuals transform the conceived landscapes of authenticity into authentic lived spaces.

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<sup>i</sup> Debates on preservation—what it means and how to conserve—engaged scholars throughout Europe. The polarized views of John Ruskin (representing the British school) and Viollet-le-Duc (representing the French one) found a compromise in the work of Camillo Boito (Italian School) and Alois Riegl (Austrian school). Written by Riegl in 1903, *The Modern Cult of Monuments* remains a key text in the discussion about the co-existing and at times conflicting values of historic monuments—values of memory: historic and age values, and values of present day: art ad use values.

<sup>ii</sup> At the national level, Western states developed legislative frames for the preservation of monuments throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In France, the first law for the protection of historic monuments was promulgated in 1877, following decades of debates that officially commenced in 1833, when historian Francois Guizot created the post of Inspector of Historic Monuments. In what is now known as Italy, measures for the protection of monuments were implemented at the single-state level before national unification in 1861. For example, in the Pontifical State, Pope Pius VII in 1802 and Cardinal Pacca in 1820 promulgated the edicts for the protection of monuments that later considerably influenced the first national law (number 364) for the protection of heritage in 1909. In England, the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882 institutionalized the approaches that William Morris and Philip Webb had discussed at the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings since 1877. In the United States, concerns for heritage preservation, explicitly influenced by the European debates, were formalized with the *Antiquities Act* of 1906 (Harrison, 2010).