

Michael Shanks

Archaeologist

Revs Program at Stanford - Codirector  
(part of CARS Center for Automotive Research at Stanford)

Hasso Plattner Institute of Design - Senior Faculty

Metamedia at Stanford - Director

# Documenting heritage: context, rationale and prospect



[mshanks.com](http://mshanks.com)

heritage - a colossal economic sector  
a large professional sector  
international agencies (UNESCO, Council of Europe, ICOMOS)  
government agencies (Ministries of Culture)  
NGOs  
the academy

Or, lessons from the world of  
heritage management

be careful ...

cars are now heritage

d. 

[mshanks.com](http://mshanks.com)

archaeologists don't discover and document the past

they **work on what remains**

an archaeological perspective



record and inventory have long been the cornerstone of  
heritage management

documentation - contexts



the **heritage industry** - colossal growth in the last 30 years  
(subsumes Cultural Resource Management (CRM), as called in the US)

context - heritage today



we are at the **end of the era** of the combustion engine  
this is demanding new perspectives and outlooks

automotive heritage - one of the most significant projects ever  
in the field of heritage/CRM

because **personal mobility**, so crucial to modernity, is changing, and cars are so ubiquitous, reaching into every  
aspect of life

context - automotive pasts and futures



attitudes towards making and things are changing radically

- industrial design is now the **design of experiences**  
in “the experience economy”, with its focus upon authenticity and identity

- sustainable design demands awareness of the dynamic connections in our **cultural ecologies** of people, things,  
other species, the troposphere, atmosphere, lithosphere

**cars are no longer just cars (were they ever?)**

# context - design today





a celebration of what is left of the past-in-the-present?

some cases

Ellison's in Palo Alto - regulatory craziness

The Houses of Parliament in London - a world heritage site under threat (!)

the black market in antiquities - the destruction of the past

# heritage - the concept and its dark side



what to avoid (lessons from the last 30 years)

the question - whose heritage is being protected?

popular versus professional interests

history versus heritage

the emphasis upon property - things and sites, legacy and inheritance

top down regulation/advice

abstract, typically monetary, principles of worth

life turned into a museum

# heritage - its dark side

best practice

take stakeholder interests seriously - shift from experts, usually self-appointed, telling others what they should cherish,  
to collaboration

embrace the complementarity of tangible and intangible heritage - experience and narrative as well as things and places

aim not for protection and stewardship as ends in themselves,  
serving abstract value,  
but wellbeing - rich human experience, and the celebration of diverse identities

# heritage lessons from the last ten years



heritage is cultural politics



history is not what happened in the past  
there is no baseline to historical event - there is no singularity to history

the power of the notion of heritage is that it refers to **connection**  
heritage refers to **our relationships with what remains**

just as history always implies historiography - retelling  
(and, yes, documentation)

# heritage and history

heritage and history both offer **orientation** on who we are,  
where we have come from

this is fundamental to **identity**  
(not lost on corporations who look to add value to their brand through history)  
fundamental to wellbeing

so history and heritage always need retelling, revisiting,  
recollecting, reworking, restoring

# heritage and history



vital questions of how to maintain solid bases of our  
**relationships with the past**

taking us back to the nineteenth century - legislative efforts in wake of decline of tradition, urbanization, industrial mass production, alienation focused upon inventory and inscription

old archaeological questions - just how do you document a ruin,  
or a Bentley from the 30s?

new questions - how do you capture the experience of a 60s hotrod?

# documentation



documentation always fails





the archive - not just documents and records per se, but artifactual remains as the means of maintaining rich human relationships with the past

we are now in the world of **Archive 3.0** - the animated archive

the collaborative, cocreative, and dynamic archive  
where history is made as we collectively engage with what remains  
(the Revs example)

# the animated archive



historical significance is about senses of history  
rather than sets of attributes or features

it is about **efficacy** - “this car mattered” “it made a difference”

authenticity is directly related to senses of such **involvement/entanglement**

an authentic past is one you can identify with, on whatever grounds (including the local, intimate, vernacular)

# senses of history



a fundamental value and process proposed as the heart of automotive heritage and history

sensitivity to people-and-things-in-time

to the different senses of history and historical significance

care involves triage - leave well-alone, restoration, replication, representation, reenactment ...

care is flexible and adaptive, pragmatic

care will be the best way through the cultural politics of automotive heritage

care



we care about cars because we care about people



a call to action, because we care about what has been so important to so many, caring about where we have come from and where we may be going

the moment of automotive heritage

