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All Heritage is Intangible: Critical Heritage Studies and Museums

Laurajane Smith (Canberra, AU)

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Foreword

In 2008 the Reinwardt Academy decided to honour Caspar Reinwardt by organising a yearly Reinwardt Memorial Lecture to be held on or around his birthday, June 3. Caspar Reinwardt (1773-1854) was a well respected naturalist, professor at three universities (Harderwijk, Amsterdam, Leiden), director of four botanical gardens (Harderwijk, Amsterdam, Bogor, Leiden), and director of one natural history museum (Amsterdam). During his stay in the former Dutch East-Indies (1816-1822) he assembled large collections that found their way to major Dutch museums of natural history and anthropology. Reinwardt maintained a large international network, including such famous naturalists as Alexander von Humboldt. The Reinwardt Academy is proud to bear his name. As a person Reinwardt stands for values that the academy considers to be of key importance: international orientation, collaboration in networks, sensitivity to the needs of society and the social relevancy of knowledge, and a helpful attitude towards students. Reinwardt was no prolific writer; he was first of all teacher. Through his lively correspondence, his extensive library, and his participation in a wide variety of scientific committees he was well aware of contemporary developments in the field of science, and he considered it as his first responsibility to share this knowledge with his students. It is in this spirit, with reference to the five values mentioned before, that the academy invites every year a distinguished speaker for its Reinwardt Memorial Lecture.

The academy is very happy that Laurajane Smith
accepted the invitation to give the 2011 Reinwardt
Memorial Lecture. Different as she might be as person
and as a professional, Laurajane Smiths shares some
characteristics with Caspar Reinwardt: modesty and
dedication, but also a rich knowledge of the contemporary
discourse. Contrary to Reinwardt, Laurajane Smith's
writings are known by many students of the academy.
Some of her propositions belong to the Reinwardt canon
of heritagetheory, such as "The discursive construction
of heritage is itself part of the cultural and social practices
that are heritage". This reflexiveness about our own
practice, and about the biasses in our theoretical models,
has always been important in how the academy perceives
its role as a training institute.

Peter van Mensch

Professor emeritus Cultural Heritage
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All Heritage is Intangible:
Critical Heritage Studies and Museums

Introduction

Academic and professional work in the field of heritagestudies is often conducted in isolation from museum studies, despite the fact that both fields deal with various sides of what is, after all, the same subject: heritage. However, interdisciplinary research and practice in cultural heritage (however that may be defined) is increasing, while the division between museum studies and other heritage research is decreasing, in tune with what Rodney Harrison (2010) has called *critical heritage studies.*

In this talk I would like, first of all, to trace the development of heritage studies to the point where the new critical arguments have became both possible and necessary. In doing so I want to highlight the growing realization that heritage is a process of cultural production, and that the disciplines involved in heritage research and practices are themselves involved in *making* heritage.

My second aim is to explore how museum practices, including those of collecting, curation, exhibition development etc., are part of the processes of heritage making. In addition, I also argue that what visitors do in museums and at heritage sites is yet another process of heritage making.

The development of Anglophone heritage studies

The 1985 publication of David Lowenthal's The Past is a Foreign Country marks the beginning, at least in the English speaking world, of focused academic attention on heritage. Together with other Anglophone authors, such as Wright and Hewison from history, Walsh and Shanks and Tilley from archaeology, and Bennett from sociology,[1] Lowenthal was responding to three intertwined events. The first was, since the end of World War II, the increasing public, national and international policy interest with saving what was perceived as fragile and finite resources of human creation for the betterment of future generations. The second was the growth of what at the time was seen as the uncontrolled economic exploitation of heritage, which was expressed in two ways:

1   Involvement of the tourism sector in heritage, which brought fears of the potential commodification, or Disneyfication, of the past and of heritage sites in particular, and
2   Development of community-specific museums, eco-museums and heritage centers that challenged the traditional nationalizing and citizen-making focus of larger museums; the diversification of museums at this time was also often characterized as offering simple economic panaceas to de-industrialized or otherwise marginalized communities.

This economic concern was driven by the third intertwined event, which was the academic concern with the march to the right occurring at both political and social levels in many Western countries. This included the use of ideas of heritage and patrimony in underpinning conservative social and cultural policies.

In many ways, heritage studies at this time took a significant miss-step. Heritage became characterized and understood in two ways.

The first was a technical process of management and conservation, dominated by what I have called the Authorized Heritage Discourse, or AHD (Smith 2006). This is a professional and technical discourse with its roots in nineteenth-century Western European architectural and archaeological conservation debates. It focuses attention on aesthetically pleasing or old material objects, sites, places and landscapes that current generations are held to protect, so that they may be passed on to future generations. This idea of inheritance is stressed in such a way that current generations are disengaged from an active use of it, as the moral imperative is to pass on cultural treasures to future generations unaltered. The idea that the value of material culture is innate rather than associative is securely embedded in this discourse. Here, heritage is fragile, finite and non-renewable, and must fall under the care of experts, often archaeologists, museum curators, architects and so forth. These are, naturally, the

Patrick Wright (1985); Robert Hewison (1981, 1987); Kevin Walsh (1992); Shanks and Tilley (1987); Tony Bennett (1995).

ones best placed to stand in as stewards for the past and to understand and communicate the value of heritage not only to the nation but to a global audience as well.

Assumptions about the innate value of heritage also reinforce the idea that it represents all that is good about the past, and that it will contribute to the continuing development of the cultural character of the present and the future. Another given in this discourse is that of identity. Heritage is about the construction of identity, specifically national identity - although how identity is actually constructed by or from heritage sites or places is never scrutinized, it is just taken for granted.

The AHD constructs not only a particular definition of heritage, but also an authorized mentality, which is deployed to understand and deal with certain social problems centered on claims to identity. It is not monolithic, however, but subject to variation and contestation. Nonetheless, it is real in the sense that an authorized understanding of heritage exists, which has its consequences. One of the consequences is to exclude those understandings of heritage that sit outside it or are oppositional to it. Another consequence is that it continually validates those forms of knowledge and values that have contributed to it.

Western academia began, in the 1990s, to set up postgraduate courses dedicated to the vocational training of heritage and museum professionals. Their curricula tended to emphasize the technical processes of management and curation, which were largely framed by the AHD. This development was matched, as David Harvey (2001) argues, by a prolific literature centered on the practical and pragmatic issues of conservation, preservation and management, value assessments, law, policy, best practice and ethics. In particular, these issues have been a central concern in museums, archaeology and architecture. Many studies in those fields have been driven by, for instance, archaeological and architectural engagement with what has been called Cultural Resource Management/Cultural Heritage Management and buildings preservation/conservation.

The second characterization of heritage has been dominated by Lowenthal's (1996, 1998, 2006) position that it is 'false history'. In the UK, at this time, heritage was publicly used to champion a socially and politically conservative belief that things were better in the past, and that Western societies should return to forgotten, past social and cultural values. This conservative use of heritage dominated much of the academic debate during the early establishment of heritage studies. Thus, what this awakening moment of heritage scholarship has done was to point academic interest in heritage studies along two quite narrow paths. The first was a technical path where it was believed that the political use of heritage could be ignored, or even controlled, through the provision of trained and so-called objective and professional experts, who are

Fig 1 A typical English Country House, a heritage site very much embedded within the Authorized Heritage Discourse. (Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, built in 1874-1889 for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild. Source: Wikipedia, by Mattlever, 2007)

Fig 2 The Stockman's Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre,

well versed in the technical application of national and international legal and policy instruments. The second was an academic path, based on the rather elitist idea that heritage is an oppositional, or popular, form of history that must be regarded with suspicion and brought under the control of such professionals as historians, archaeologists and museums curators.

These paths were followed in spite of the insights offered by Raphael Samuel in Theatres of Memory (1994: 225) that heritage had become '…one of the major…social movements of our time'. Samuel argued that, while the conservative use of heritage was indeed a real phenomenon, it was not the whole story, and that heritage was used in a variety of social and political ways that merited academic attention. What is interesting to note is the different degrees in which each of these authors have influenced subsequent debates. A search of Google scholar (as of May 2011), for instance, reveals that the 1995 reprint of Lowenthal's The Past is a Foreign Country has received 2600 citations, his later 1998 work The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History a further 500, and Robert Hewison's The Heritage Industry over 900. Samuel's Theatres of Memory, which I believe was then, and is now, a better guide on how to analyze heritage, has just 380 citations. Of course, Google scholar is by no means accurate and Samuel died relatively young, whilst Lowenthal is still active in his eighties, but this record is suggestive of the relative influence of particular positions on the nature and meaning of heritage.

Although the path Lowenthal and colleagues have led heritage studies on appears oppositional to the AHD that frames the technical understandings of heritage, it actually reproduces some of the elements of this discourse. This position, after Robert Hewison (1987) sometimes referred to as heritage industry critique, constructs heritage visitors, or users, as passive consumers that need the intervention of experts to understand the real significance of the past. It also focuses debate on the slippery and somewhat circular issues of authenticity and cultural ownership, and defines heritage as reactionary and passive, rather than active and creative.

What is also interesting, and relevant to the work being done here at the Reinwardt Academy, is that heritage studies developed in isolation from museum studies. If you go through the heritage literature up until the early 2000s there is little, if any, cross-referencing to work in museum studies.

This is the intellectual impasse that heritage studies had reached by the end of the last century. We are now, however, seeing a surge in the academic literature that Rodney Harrison (2010) has referred to as critical heritage studies. Where I think this increased interest has come from is not the academic path traveled by Lowenthal et al., but ironically from the practice-driven literature in both heritage and museum studies. The focus on practice has in fact thrown up some of the critical issues that have started

to engage scholars who have cared to listen. One of the most significant issues, if not the key issue, in galvanizing this turn in the debate is that of community engagement in heritage and museums. It is when attempting to engage with community concerns that both heritage and museum studies start to talk to each other, as they experience similar community reactions to attempts of engagement and inclusion. But the AHD sets up such a significant, powerful and elitist definition of heritage that it has provided a significant foil and focus of critique for those community groups who use heritage in opposition to it. Community critique may also have been galvanized by the degree to which both heritage and museum professionals approached community work with the missionary zeal of doing 'good works'. Attempts at community engagement, however, are compromised by implementing social inclusion policies, inadvertently designed to assimilate excluded communities to authorized and dominant understandings of what constituted both culture and heritage. This process only maintained the excluding narratives established by the AHD, and thus further alienated and antagonized a wide range of community groups.

Since the late 1960s Indigenous groups in particular have challenged the primacy of expertise in the management of their heritage sites.[2] A number of non-Western commentators have also began to challenge the legitimacy

2   See for instance Deloria 1969; Langford 1983, Zimmerman 1998; Smith 2004; McNiven and Russel 2005.

of Western forms of heritage management that have, through organizations like UNESCO, ICROM and ICOMOS, tended to assert the universal relevance of Western heritage concepts and practices. In addition, a range of community groups within Western countries, either defined geographically or through shared cultural, ethnic, social or political experiences and allegiances, have also asserted their sense of heritage in opposition to that of traditional forms of expertise.

This galvanizing of community and non-Western positions on heritage is, I think, no accident. It derives from the important role that heritage has started to play as not only a social, but also a political resource in national and global arenas. Recognition of difference has become, during the last decades of the twentieth century, an identifiable arena of political conflict. Political philosophers have argued that this new way of doing politics is a platform from which to engage in struggles for social justice and parity in negotiations over the distribution of power resources, such as finance, welfare, housing and education. For Nancy Fraser (2000, 2001) the 'politics of recognition' rests on the acknowledgment that different community groups, with different histories, needs and aspirations, may make claims for recognition in both symbolic and material forms, and that these claims will have material consequences for equity and justice (Smith and Waterton 2009). This new way of doing politics has

intersected with increasing public and academic interest in heritage. I am not suggesting a direct correlation between public interest in heritage and the politics of recognition. The fact however that heritage is often used as a material or authoritative evidence of identity claims is important for understanding both the timing and increasing urgency of community agitation for control over, or a voice in, the disposition of heritage (Smith and Campbell 2011).

Responses to increasing community activism in heritage have generated attempts at critical rethinking of heritage. This ranges from, for instance, Denis Byrne's (1991, 2003) studies on the neo-colonial work that heritage undertakes, to the critical examination of social inclusion policies in Europe by a range of authors. A smaller but significant body of literature also exists that attempts to theorize heritage practice and examines the dissonance between formal heritage practices, government policies and discourses and legal instruments on the one hand, and community and other interests in heritage management, use and interpretation, on the other.

Commensurate with increasing public or community interest in heritage has been a dramatic increase in research on heritage tourism. Leaving aside the concerns of the heritage industry critique, recent critical work by many[3] has offered deeper analyzes of the performative

3   Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, 1998, 2004; Bella Dicks 2000, 2003, 2008: Graham, Ash worth and Tunbridge 2000; Tim Winter 2007; McIntosh and Prentice 1999: Poria 2007; Poria et al. 2001, 2003.

nature of heritage tourism, and the ways cultural meanings, social values and taste are constructed. In this body of work, the conceptual boundaries between heritage visitors and tourists have become blurred, and heritage studies offer a critical opportunity to question some of the so-called 'known-knowns' of tourism studies and marketing. Issues of authenticity and nostalgia, which had preoccupied debates about heritage, have also been questioned. Heritage interpretation strategies have been criticized, and questions are being asked about the ways in which heritage is utilized to legitimize, or de-legitimize, certain versions of the past. This has started to undermine the complacency within the heritage and museum field that interpretation is only about best practice, i.e., the most effective and engaging ways of educating or providing learning opportunities for a passive audience.

Another theme, represented again by a prolific body of literature, offers commentary on heritage conflict and debate, most notably over repatriation, the antiquities trade and fundamental preservation issues and practices. Though some of this literature tends to be adversarial in nature, critical commentary and attempts to go beyond simple posturing can be found, especially in the work of American authors. A growing concern is also evident in examining 'heritage that hurts', to use the title of a recent book by Joy Sather-Wagstaff,[4] and to examine the dissonant nature not only of contested and difficult heritage, but of all heritage. Acknowledging that all heritage is dissonant of course questions the assumptions of the AHD that there can, or indeed should be, universal heritage values.

A further theme examines the ways in which heritage has constructed narratives of nationalism and other forms of consensus history, observing that the identities of subaltern social, cultural and ethnic groups are rendered invisible, which facilitates their political marginalization.

There are, in addition, studies related to these same issues that examine the ways in which heritage monuments and museums are used as political tools in the process of educating, governing and regulating national identity, and the values, tastes and conduct of citizens.[5] The development of non-representational theory in heritage studies is being championed, amongst others, by Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2010), while Rodney Harrison, Tony Bennett and others are exploring the relevance of actor-network theory.

And yet another theme focusing on heritage as a cultural and social phenomenon has emerged, examining the social, economic and cultural role that heritage plays in Western cultures, and the roles that it performs in people's lives. In this work, the issues of memory and identity are a particular concern. As I have already noted, there has been limited research that examines exactly how links are forged between 'heritage' and 'identity'. It is however in the work on community heritage and on memory where these links are starting to be identified most coherently.

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4   Sather-Wagstaff 2011, but see Uzzell and Ballantyne 1999 for earlier use of this term.

5   Tony Bennett 1995; Macdonald 1997, 2007, 2009; Message 2006, 2008; Van Mensch 2010, Van Mensch and Meijer-van Mensch 2010.

Theorizations of remembering and commemoration are used to investigate social identity and its links to sense of place, while others have looked at heritage as a cultural tool in the performances of commemoration, remembering and forgetting. Work by Yaniv Poria and colleagues, and the work of Denis Byrne (2009), remind us that heritage is also about emotion, and that the emotional dimension of heritage will have implications for identity, memory, sense of place, museum and site interpretation, and understanding tourist motivation.

A final and emergent debate in Western literature is that on intangible heritage. This debate has been accelerated by the ratification of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Although, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) attests, the advent of this convention has tended to simply assert a third arbitrary category of heritage – intangible alongside cultural and natural heritage, some recognition of their interrelatedness has sparked interesting debates and has led to a certain rethinking of heritage practices.

It is out of this literature that my own understanding of heritage derives (Smith 2006). I now want to challenge the idea of heritage as a material object, site or place, and assert my own understanding of it.

Heritage is something vital and alive. It is a moment of action, not something frozen in material form. It incorporates a range of actions that often occur at certain places, or in certain spaces. Although heritage is something that is done at places, these places become places of heritage because of the events of meaning making and remembering that occur at them, and because they lend a sense of occasion and reality to the activities occurring at them.

Heritage is something that is done, although there is no one defining action, but rather a range of activities that include remembering, commemoration, communicating and passing on knowledge and memories, as well as asserting and expressing identity and social and cultural values and meanings. This process can have both conservative and socially progressive outcomes.

As an experience, and as a social and cultural performance, heritage is something with which people actively, often self-consciously, and critically engage in. What then does heritage do, what are the consequences of these moments that identify them as heritage? The products, or the consequences, of heritage activities are the emotions and experiences that they create and the memories of them that they leave, and while these then work to facilitate a sense of identity and belonging, it is not all they do. What is also created, and continually recreated (rather than

simply being maintained), are social networks and relations that themselves bind, generating a sense of belonging and identity. These networks and relations are facilitated through activities in which social and cultural values, meanings and understandings both about the past and present are sometimes explicitly, and sometimes implicitly, worked out, inspected, considered, rejected, embraced or transformed. Identity is not simply something produced or represented by heritage places or heritage moments, but is something actively and continually recreated and negotiated as people, communities and institutions reinterpret, remember, forget and reassess the meaning of the past in terms of the social, cultural and political needs of the present.

Heritage is a cultural process or embodied performance, which occurs at a number of different levels and contexts. I will draw three of these to your attention.

The first is at an institutional level. Institutions and governments are involved in heritage making not only through the development and implementation of cultural and funding policies, but also through the choices museum and heritage professionals make in amassing collections, in the choices made in developing exhibitions or not developing them, in conserving or preserving certain sites or buildings, and in the ways we choose to interpret or not interpret them. A national or international list of heritage sites is a work of heritage, as it presents certain messages and ideas about what constitutes both the past and the present. A museum collection is, in the same way, about heritage making. Sites and objects are not found but rather identified as representative of the heritage stories that heritage and museum professionals wish to make.

The second context of heritage making occurs with communities. Yet one of the communities often neglected in the heritage literature is the community of professionals (Smith and Waterton 2009). Museum staff and heritage officers may themselves be understood as a community of interest in heritage matters, as uncomfortable as that may make them. The ability of experts to engage with and control heritage items and places is a process that underpins professional identity in much the same way as it does for other communities of interest (Smith and Waterton 2009).

The third level is the individual context. While institutions such as museums and heritage agencies work to guide and influence the heritage making of their visitors, by carefully designing and constructing exhibitions and interpretive material, they cannot always control the meaning or understanding that visitors take away. Thus, the third way of heritage making occurs at the individual level, as people visit heritage sites and museum exhibitions. It is this third level that concerns much of my research work.

I have been involved in interviewing visitors at numerous museums and heritage sites in England, Australia and the USA. So far, I have interviewed or supervised the interviewing of over 3,500 visitors to about 24 different institutions. What is emerging in this data is the range of interesting memory and identity work that people engage in during what they define as recreational visits to museums and sites.

One of the strongest themes to emerge is that people do not often indicate that they go to museums and heritage sites to learn or be educated, although I want to stress that there are those that do. People rather identify that they go to reinforce what they already know, feel or believe, as the typical examples below show:

> "Each time we come to a place like this it just reinforces what I've seen and just makes me feel good to be an Australian. […] I don't think I'll take anything new um [away]…at all, but it's [my knowledge and views have] been reinforced. Reinforcement is really what I take away."[6]

> "No not really, my knowledge and experiences were relatively similar to this before [I visited] so I think it has just reinforced my ideas on it already."[7]

6   LR9 visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010
7   NMA33 visitor to First Australians exhibition, National Museum of Australia, 2010

"No, no, I don't think [the exhibition has changed my views] I think it was reinforcement, obviously there was information I didn't know or have, but it's just been reinforcing."[8]

When asked 'Did anything you have seen today changed your views about the past or present?', 83% of visitors either answered no, or that it only reinforced what they already knew or felt. This includes museums that held exhibitions that attempted to challenge received ideas or reveal hidden histories, such as English exhibitions on the British involvement in African enslavement. Indeed some people nominated that a sense of reinforcement was precisely one of the experiences that they valued in going to visit museums or heritage sites:

"I guess one looks for things [at the museum] that reinforce them [i.e., my views]."[9]

"We come to a place like this [as] it just reinforces what I've seen and just makes me feel good to be an Australian."[10]

As David Lowenthal, Robert Hewison and others have feared and predicted, one of the things that is done at museums and heritage sites by visitors is the construction of conservative and patriotic understandings of national narratives. At English country houses (Figure 1, page 14), for instance, visitors worked to reinforce a sense of nationalism based on class distinction and to whom one should show deference, or 'tip your hat':

"It's part of modern England as our history is part of being England. We would be still in the slums without places like this, but it gives us something to tip our hats to – it allows us to belong to both sides of history."[11]

The country house visit was not only about nation, it was about the status and place of the white middle class in English society:

"As well as being in touch with heritage – it's a very important part of leisure time – very middle class thing to do. … Particularly important to middle class – gives pleasure. But that's alright: different places appeal to different people."[12]

8   LA41(75) visitor to the International Slavery Museum, Liverpool, 2007
9   LRE025 visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010
10   LR6 visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010

11   CH128 – emphasis added – 2004
12   CH369, 2004

Fig 3   'The Ringer' (1988, by Eddie Hackman) outside the Stockman's Hall of Fame.
This is an iconic image, against which many visitors pose for their picture to be taken.
© Laurajane Smith

Fig 4   Labour History festival, Castleford, West Yorkshire, UK. © Laurajane Smith

"To the vast majority it doesn't mean a thing – people would rather go shopping. It seems to be a middle class thing [visiting country houses] due to education and how you are brought up to reflect, it reflects the direction of your education."[13]

Here the English Authorized Heritage Discourse framed the way visitors engaged with the house museum and its heritage meanings for their sense of self and belonging. This sense of belonging was based on a certain understanding of class distinction and on the performative middle class ability to demonstrate the possession of certain tastes and skills in reading the elite aesthetic meanings of the house museum that they were visiting (Smith 2006).

In Australia, the national mythology of the importance of the rural sector in nation building is reinforced for some visitors visiting the Stockman's Hall of Fame (Figure 2, page 14). This is a museum located in rural Queensland, about 1,200 km from the city of Brisbane, dedicated to telling the history of not only European stockworkers or stockmen (what the Americans call cowboys and the Argentines gauchos, see Figure 3, page 30). These workers hold a particular romantic place in Australian origin myths, but the museum, I need to note, also offers some challenges to that story by asserting the role of Aboriginal men and women in this history. Australia is historically an urban country, with around 89% of the population currently living in urban

13   CH409, 2004

centres along the Australian coast. The rural experience depicted at this museum is thus not reflective of the current or historical experiences of the majority of Australians. Nonetheless, some visitors to this museum found the real Australia here:

> "I mean the bush is the real Australia but the cities aren't."[14]

> "Uh, I guess it [the museum] stirs quite a few emotions. I feel very proud, you know, I'm proud to be Australian and for what we stand for. You know, its very um…it's definitely the heart of the outback and I guess you could describe it as the backbone of Australia, in my opinion."[15]

Further, many visitors from rural backgrounds saw the museum as an opportunity for city or coastal people to understand the true meaning and value of being Australian, noting that:

> "I think the city people still need to know what the heritage of Australia [is] … and I think, yes, they need to be told."[16]

> "Yeah it's just glossed over [the history of rural Australia]…which is okay but … some of the city people who've always been city people and wouldn't have a clue. … if you hadn't been in the country and understood, um…you wouldn't comprehend how things happened. They just sort of take everything [for granted]."[17]

What is interesting here is that many of those who had come from urban backgrounds to this museum expressed humility and historical debt to the rural sector, some even noting that they were on a pilgrimage of respect – thus reinforcing the Australian AHD and the historical place it reserves for the rural sector in Australian national identity. As one person noted:

> "It just opens up your eyes to really the hardships of what the pioneers did to open up Australia and I think it's a pilgrimage everyone should make."[18]

The pioneer myth that many of these people were advocating here of course not only underestimates the role of urban, and thus multicultural communities, in Australian national identity. It also glosses over a range of issues to do with the subjugation and economic and sexual exploitation of Aboriginal stock workers. These examples may do much to reinforce Lowenthal's and Hewison's concerns

14   LR112: visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010
15   LR028: visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010, my emphasis
16   LR022: visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010

17   LR080: visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010
18   LR116: visitor to Stockman's Hall of Fame, 2010

that heritage is false history and inherently conservative. Certainly, at this site people are using the heritage work they are doing to reinforce and validate certain conservative values and identities. However, this is not the only theme that emerges from the data, since critical identity work is also undertaken.

At labour history museums and festivals in both Australia and England, visitors were also engaged in the development of individual and community identities. These drew on more progressive understandings of heritage, and used museums and heritage sites as places to reminisce and remember familial or community experiences, and to pass on these memories and the values that underpinned them to relatives and children:

> "Being here brings memories back and it's nice to share them with the family."[19]

> "Being here means knowing one's past, otherwise you have no memory, memory is important, it's in the landscape and buildings."[20]

> "For a short time feeling part of history, even recent history … It just brings things home – it reinforces how you feel about the past."[21]

Often these reminiscences reinforced progressive political values in terms of what it meant to live as a member in a particular community, while others used their reminiscing and sense of nostalgia to develop quite critical social commentaries on the present:

> "It just reminds me not to forget what happened and to keep on my guard … That the ruling classes didn't give a damn about anybody except themselves … Yes, I'm in a trade union and I know that in a smaller way these things are still going on and that we are still fighting to stop management taking advantage of their workers."[22]

> "Understanding that it wasn't all a green and pleasant land for all people, it was hard work but they had the guts to stand up. Politics affects everybody, it's not just Parliament."[23]

> "I'm from a mining village and [I am thinking about] the major ramifications culturally and socially that the closing of the industry has had."[24]

19   NCMM14, male, over 60, factory worker, ex-miner, England 2004
20   TP30, male, over 60, teacher, England 2004
21   OAM85, male, over 60, accountant, England, 2004

22   TP34, male, 40-59, train driver, England 2004
23   TP19, female, 30-39, teacher, England 2004
24   NCMM 83, male, 30-39, sales assistant, England 2004

In Australia, some visitors to the Stockman's Hall of Fame used their visits to reflect critically on current social topics dealing with Indigenous issues and racism:

> "It's a whole attitude change. It's an attitude we have as white people all this time and it's reflected [in one of the displays about] one of these explorers when in fact the woman, the Aboriginal woman in his camp, showed him the way across the Darling Downs, I think it was, and he's credited. He's credited with actually finding the way, but it was always there according to the Aborigines. But that's like an attitude that existed back then and we seem to carry it through everything that we do."[25]

Critical memory and identity work was undertaken at other sites I have surveyed. For instance, at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australians used their visits in similar ways to those at the labour history museums in England. Here, visitors not only used their visits to remember and think about the stories of immigration told by their parents or grandparents, but also to negotiate the cultural values of their families and those of contemporary Australia, often offering quite radical and acute social and personal insights while doing so.

Another important theme that emerges is the way people critically engage with institutional heritage making. During the 2007 bicentenary in Britain, African-Caribbean British visitors to museums used their visits to assess the temperature of public debate and recognition of the legacies of enslavement, determining the degree to which issues of racism and multiculturalism had been adequately dealt with, or not, by the museum as a state institution (Smith 2011). African-Caribbean visitors were not so much engaged in remaking or asserting their own identities, as using the visit to assess and measure how the white British community was expressing itself:

> "I think [the exhibition] signals part of the process of beginning to understand um…English or British involvement in slavery as well as giving us a signal that there is some acknowledgment of the suffering that we've been through. It remains to be seen whether it's integrated into the life and history and education of Britain."[26]

This is a very broad and rough tour of some of the data I am collecting on the heritage work that visitors to museums and heritage sites do, and I cannot do justice to it all here, obviously. There are several points I want to stress however:

First, the diversity of ways heritage is used and understood.

Second, this diversity is expressed across not only different genres and types of museums and heritage places, but also within individual museums and sites.

Third, heritage and museum professionals cannot always control the way heritage is used and remade by visitors and communities.

Fourth, we may not always feel comfortable, or like the work that heritage does in society, but when it does work, it cannot be reduced to the status of false history.

Fifth, a sense of the past is actively created not just by institutions, but also by visitors to museums and heritage sites. Museum visitors, as users of heritage, are not passive, they are active in the way they understand and utilize heritage making.

What this all means is that museums and heritage sites are not 'safe' places, as some have argued, nor are they passive, as dynamic and contentious meaning making can occur at them. It may be that we do not always like the politics of what is produced there, and we may not like the fact that we cannot always control what is produced. This last observation can move us back to the formative moments of heritage studies, when the realization that we cannot control all the work that heritage does was possibly quite frightening to early heritage scholars. Consequently, these scholars expressed a strong distrust in heritage, and sought to dismiss it as false history, in order to bring it under the control of the expertise of historians, archaeologists and museum curators. I think this is short-sighted and denies the significance of the phenomenon. Heritage is not only a social movement, as Raphael Samuel identified, it is also a subjective political negotiation of identity, place and memory. All heritage is intangible, in so far as heritage is a moment, or a process, of re/constructing cultural and social values and meanings. It is a process, or indeed a performance, in which we as individuals, communities or nations, identify the values and cultural and social meanings that help us make sense of the present, our identities and sense of physical and social place. This is not a process that can be confined by the technical policies of site management, conservation, museum curation or World Heritage lists.

Critical heritage studies needs a clear focus on the experiences of the users and uses of heritage, and its links to issues of power, place, class, ethnicity, race and other forms of identity. Above all else, critical heritage studies need to be critical, it needs to ask hard questions about the use of power and ideology, and how memories and identities are shaped and for what purposes. It also poses challenges to people who possess professional forms of expertise.
I would like to paraphrase the great political theorist Antonio Gramsci who noted that all people are intellectuals, but not all of them are paid to perform that function in society.
I suggest that all people interpret and perform heritage, but not all people are employed to do so.

This leads to what I see as another key element of a critical heritage studies: democratizing heritage means that a broad range of community interests, some of them artificially silenced by the way heritage has been traditionally approached, need to drive new directions in thinking about heritage. Needless to say this is a challenge for many people in the heritage and museums sector, but if critical heritage studies is to mean anything then it has to inform practice, education and training, and offer a new mentality and way of doing things in the heritage and museums sector. The new museology has influenced what happens in the museums sector to some extent, but I believe that there is still a lot of work to do, and that broadening museum studies within the broader remit of heritage studies can have a positive effect.

Critical Heritage Studies must also – and I feel slightly self-conscious saying this as I deliver a lecture in English in the Netherlands – work as a forum to synthesize critical writings on heritage from non-Anglophone writers, activists and practitioners. This is particularly important for those from Asia, Latin America and Africa, but I find that there is a lack of engagement between new ways of researching heritage between the Anglophone literature and other European language communities.

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Colophon

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