Book Reviews

Elizabeth Anderson, Avril Maddrell, Kate McLoughlin and Alana Vincent (eds.), *Memory, Mourning, Landscape*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010, paperback £41.40, pp. xiv+218

Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, hardback £22.50, pp. xviii+458

We are living in 'memory's privileged time', argues Andreas Huyssen in his 1995 monograph *Twilight Memories* (Huyssen 1995: 3). The 'memory boom' we find ourselves amidst is, for him, symptomatic of a contemporary anxiety surrounding the threat posed by technological modernization and generational change to unmediated access to the past. We are fixated upon remembrance, he avers, precisely because we are confronted with a temporal crisis in the present. The two books under review here, both dealing with memorials, have quite clearly registered this resurgence of interest in issues of memory and see it as an important context within which to analyse the social and cultural dimensions of memorialization. In the introduction to *Memory, Mourning, Landscape*, for instance, the editors draw upon French historian Pierre Nora's argument that today's commemorative consciousness 'survives in a history which, having renounced memory, cries out for it' (x; original quotation in Nora 1996: 6). Though it is the relationship between commemoration and space more broadly conceived that forms the focus of the volume's contributions, many do deal quite explicitly with purpose-built memorials. Erika Doss, the author of *Memorial Mania*, by contrast explores contemporary memorialization in America and its relation specifically to an emergent desire amongst Americans to engage affectively with anxieties surrounding the nation's past and present.

What the two works also share is an implicit understanding of memorials as representations of history embedded within space and social contexts rather than as pristine invocations of past experience. The fact that remembrance does not take place in a vacuum but is, rather, an act of re-presenting the past in the present has not been lost on recent memorial scholarship, which has increasingly recognized the historically contingent and mutable message of memorial forms. As Bill Niven has pointed out, memorials 'evolve in line with shifting perceptions of history, sloughing off unwanted parts or acquiring new ones' as they are continually reinvested with new meaning (Niven 2008: 105). The focus placed by memorial studies on the fluidity of meaning and its potential for re-inscription will, of course, be familiar to museum scholars and practitioners, who have long regarded the museum as a 'political arena' in which exhibition narratives are similarly open to contestation (Kaplan 1995: 55) or bound up with questions of power and cultural hegemony (see for instance Karp and Levine 1991; Murphy 2005). That said, the approaches offered by both works reviewed here to the interplay between cultural memory, identity and space will doubtless be of interest to those outside of the fields of museum and memorial studies too.

The conference proceedings compiled by Elizabeth Anderson and her co-editors are collectively interested as much in the submerged and displaced memories beneath particular landscapes as in surface readings of spaces constructed by remembrance and mourning. As Kate McLoughlin stresses in her introduction: '[t]his collection…aims to uncover the situational dimension of memory and mourning and with it what those two activities may dis-locate' (ix). It is pleasing to see this task taken on from various disciplinary perspectives, including history, museum studies, literature, anthropology, architecture, law, geography, theology and archaeology. In recognition of the volume's interdisciplinarity and its overarching thematic concerns, it is sited at the 'intersection' (ix) between the axes drawn by memory and spatiality;

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that is, between a vertical, temporal axis and a horizontal, spatial axis. The approach is, indeed, taken up quite explicitly in Jay Winter's opening chapter on the Museum of the Great War in Péronne, where the dimensions of museum space subtly prefigure strategies of commemoration. As Winter explains, the vertical forms typically associated with more bombastic, celebratory war memorials are largely avoided here, and visitors are instead offered a more contemplative experience structured around horizontal exhibition arrangements. Given that discussion of horizontality and verticality clearly structures his chapter, it is slightly surprising to see so few of the subsequent contributions explicitly refer back to this terminology.

What they do, however, provide is an impressively wide-ranging survey of both physical and symbolic commemorative landscapes. In his chapter dealing with commemorations of war dead in revolutionary France, Joseph Clarke points to a brief period in which monuments erected by Jacobin clubs and popular societies tended to name individual soldiers. Even if this practice proved to be short-lived, it nevertheless pre-dated the *monuments-aux-morts* dedicated to soldiers of the Great War by some time. Literary renderings of battlefields as a form of testimony are the subject of Cynthia Wachtell's chapter on the Battle of Malvern Hill, fought between Union and Confederate troops on 1 July 1862. She focuses in particular on Herman Melville's poem *Malvern Hill*, setting it against the more heroizing treatment the battle receives in other Civil War-era poetry. Uniquely, Melville depicts the natural landscape at the site of the battle in its permanence and immutability as a 'harsh rebuke to the war generation that destroyed life so recklessly' (51).

Shifting focus away from commemoration of the war dead, Alana Vincent looks at liturgical representations of 'Jerusalem' as an idealized landscape. Unlike the battlefield of Melville's poem, Jerusalem is very much mutable – becoming, as Vincent demonstrates through looking at the final line of the Passover Seder in several different liturgical texts (*haggadot*), more of a mobile symbol that helps to underpin constructions of religious identity in the present. Erin Halstad-McGuire looks at strategies of reinforcing a different kind of identity in her chapter, namely that of *migrant* identity during the Viking Age. Analysing the architecture and contents of boat-graves in Orkney, Iceland, and Norway, she illustrates how burial practices on the Viking Frontier were a means of importing immigrants' customs and incorporating them into the geography of new settler communities on the Frontier. These two chapters raise some fascinating points, as do Clarke and Wachtell's contributions, but they neglect to tease out wider conclusions about the mode of remembrance engendered by the media they investigate.

More successful in this regard is Judith Tucker's reflective piece on her painting series *Tense*, in which she explores landscapes as a middle ground between (traumatic) memory and history. She regards paintings of scenes taken from her family photo albums as 'postmemorial' spaces (Hirsch 1997) for interrogating the tension between affective and mediated confrontation with inherited family memories of National Socialist Germany. Hilary Hiriam also addresses the potentially traumatic experience of space in her survey of a series of wills in Scotland during the early nineteenth century. Deftly applying both Sigmund Freud's concepts of melancholy and mourning and Vamik Volkan's theory of perennial mourning, Hiriam explains why courts were often uneasy about allowing wills to contain directions for memorializing a testator or their family. Memorials of this kind represented, as legal reasoning had it, a pathological form of over-identification with deceased family members rather than an appropriate expression of mourning.

In Joel David Robinson's piece on funerary and cemetery architecture, the sites are analysed not just in terms of their relationship to remembering loss, but also according to how they facilitate forgetting. At the Igualada cemetery in Barcelona, for instance, Robinson illustrates how its location – a dried-up riverbed – at once evokes both the timelessness of a cemetery and the gradual erosion of the landscape by the river, hinting at a dialogical relationship between remembrance and forgetting. His contribution explores landscape's potential to excavate layers of the past and provide something approaching an archaeology of memory, making it an interesting counterpoint to Hiriam and Tucker's discussions of landscapes collapsing time.

Other chapters take a synchronic look at space and address the multiple and competing readings of landscape. Sarah Wagner, in her discussion of the Srebrenica-Potoèari Memorial Centre, demonstrates how remembrance has become inextricably entwined with the fraught identity politics in the Balkans. Whilst Bosniak Muslims remember the massacre of 11 July 1995

by gathering amongst rows of plain white headstones signifying the 8000 or so victims, Bosnian Serbs hold a counter-service the following day to remember their own war dead from the Srebrenica region. The site topography likewise reflects the dubious politics of commemorating the dead; orderly rows of graves each bearing an inscription from the Koran impose an ethno-nationalist claim upon the region, as do the accompanying rituals and blanket reference to the victims as Islamic martyrs (73).

Contests around sites of memory are analysed by Avril Maddrell too, who looks in her excellent chapter at debates surrounding spontaneous memorials in the Scottish Highlands. Instead of reading the landscape as text, Maddrell proposes that it be seen as a site of 'embodied performance' (126), allowing her to map out responses to the memorials according to how different groups interact with the mountainside. As she compellingly shows, the 'claims' of certain groups of seasoned walkers and climbers to the Highlands as a place primarily for endeavour and risk-taking implicitly constructs a gendered view of the landscape. Objections to the memorials that Maddrell gleans from online debates rely largely upon casting them as *feminine* shows of emotion that do not belong in an otherwise *masculine* space.

Given the high overall quality of the individual contributions and the interesting range of approaches to issues of space and remembrance, the volume would have been well served by a longer introduction that more fully engaged with the concepts under discussion. As it is, the editors venture neither a use of horizontality and verticality as conceptual threads, hinted at with promise in Jay Winter's opening chapter (see above), nor a theoretical elaboration of key terms such as 'mourning'. Consequently, the role of memorial spaces in mitigating and managing traumatic affect – one of the most valuable points the volume has to make – is not as strongly argued as it could have been. Freud's distinction between melancholia and mourning is an apt theoretical model, but only in Hilary Hiriam's chapter is it meaningfully interrogated. And whilst Judith Tucker does discuss remembrance in relation to secondary witnessing, the volume as a whole is unable to say much on the ethical implications of negotiating a subject position between the poles of transferential witnessing and distanced, critical memory. Dominick LaCapra has written important work in this regard (see LaCapra 1998: 11*ff*; 2001: ch. 2), and it would have been useful to probe how landscape in particular has a role to play in his ethical critique of remembering uncomfortable pasts. That being said, *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* boasts several especially strong contributions – Avril Maddrell, Hilary Hiriam and Joel David Robinson's stand out in particular – that self-reflexively blend theory and analysis to offer useful insights into how landscape both structures and reflects memory practices.

Erica Doss' monograph has a somewhat narrower (though no less ambitious) geographical focus on memorialization in America, a practice it situates firmly within an affective terrain of public feeling and experience (53). For Doss, there is something frenetic about contemporary moves to anchor issues of memory and history in popular consciousness: what she refers to as 'an urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public contexts' (2). As such, the 'memorial mania' supposedly gripping America stems from 'the fevered pitch of public feelings such as grief, gratitude, fear, shame, and anger' (2), each of which Doss treats in its own separate chapter. She distinguishes this more recent phenomenon from an equivalent nineteenth- and early twentieth-century 'statue mania' (20*ff*) on account of the former's 'discursive ambitions; its experientiality, irresolution and ambivalence; and its tendency to express social contradictions and historical traumas' (47). If 'statue mania' in America sought to solidify the bonds of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' and appeal to a consensual national identity based on great men and their deeds, then 'memorial mania' has by contrast eschewed the monumental, catering instead to individual and group demands voiced by a heterogeneous American public. The memorial landscape of the United States today, thus, belongs very much to a culture (and business) of managing emotional tension, Doss argues, and it necessary to ask both why contemporary Americans are inclined to engage in memory work on such experiential, affective terms, as well as what this says about national identity.

The book begins with a discussion of grief-based memorialization, in which Doss draws on temporary memorials to the 1999 Columbine Massacre in Boulder, Colorado as well as roadside memorials to victims of driving accidents. Particularly at Columbine, Doss argues that the memorials – many of which were erected by members of the Christian far Right – helped to deflect attention away from the potentially thorny issue of gun control that lay at the heart of

the tragedy. She contends, with good reason, that their overtly religious message presented victims of the shooting as Christian martyrs and effectively closed off discussion of its troubling underlying causes.

Doss turns next to memorials that reflect fears about national security, once again voicing a degree of scepticism about their underlying narrative. Though memorials to the 9/11 terrorist attacks understandably make up the core of the analysis here, other minimalist projects such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Murrah Federal Building Memorial are also looked at. Whilst Doss sees a socially 'transgressive' potential (127) behind minimalist memorials and the searching questions they ask about unfathomable histories, she regards this particular aesthetic to be drastically watered down in America, where narratives of healing and recovery override.

Particularly incisive are her comments on sacralised memorialization of relics recovered from the World Trade Centre, which in fact lends itself well to Jay Winter's schemata of spatiality in memorial architecture that begins the *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* volume. Doss points to the nationwide veneration of wreckage salvaged from the World Trade Centre site, whilst Eric Fischl's *Tumbling Woman*, another memorial project that could claim to be an honest representation of a 9/11 victim if not necessarily an authentic piece of that history, was shut down within days of being unveiled to the public. Significantly, the site relics often made for minimalist memorials but utilized the vertical plane of presentation – many were, for instance, upright steel I beams – whilst Fischl's deeply unpopular work depicted a figure in perpetual free fall (164). Could the unequivocal public rejection of Fischl's attempt to undercut vertical (and therefore triumphal) memorial forms indicate a need for traditionally figurative memorial art on the part of American audiences confronted with the trauma of 9/11? Doss' argument that they relate to the event primarily on affective terms could well be borne out by looking at the prevalence of vertical forms (or rather the marginality of horizontal forms) in terrorism memorials.

In the following chapter, concerned with monuments expressing gratitude to America's 'greatest generation' of World War II veterans, Doss perceives there to have been a trend towards centralizing and canonizing memory of the conflict. If the central monument on the Mall in Washington aggrandizes the American war effort, then so too, according to Doss, do the spate of more modest memorials to minority groups in the US armed forces. For they all fall back on the overarching trope of masculine bravado and, in the end, act as aggregate parts in a story of national military might. Even in the rare event that memorials deal openly and honestly with the consequences of going to war, such as the Eyes Wide Open memorial in Chicago, a carefully laid out collection of deceased servicemen's combat boots, they nevertheless fail to critique the broader appeal of war and militarism (251).

Memorials to slavery and the treatment of American Indians are dealt with in an excellent chapter on shameful aspects of the American past. For Doss, shame can be a productive impulse for memorialization, given that it is an emotion that may be 'inhabitable and potentially enabling' (264). Just as Judith Tucker's chapter in *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* uses the medium of painting to mine the potential for retrieving 'deep memory' of an inherited past, Doss looks at how shame is harnessed by memorials in order to deal with postmemory of slavery in America. She shows that some memorials – particularly photographic exhibitions of lynching – directly confront viewers with atrocity images and trigger a kind of blunt traumatization. Others, however, shirk trauma altogether and offer little more than sanitized narratives of survival by displaying liberated slaves in defiant poses. The Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial in Duluth and the African Burial Ground Memorial on Broadway in New York manage to occupy a middle ground between these extremes. They do not shy away from referencing the tragic fates of African Americans, but also provide historical context, facilitating reflection on the shameful actions of the perpetrators through the lens of latter-day notions of social justice. The result is, for Doss, a narrative of redemption that is 'neither comfortable nor casual' (308).

She echoes the need for memorials to serve a critical approach to history in her final chapter centred on anger. As Doss makes clear, this emotion has been directed in large part at supposedly revisionist memorials and tends to characterize not so much the process of making memorials as the act of disputing them. Yet is an angered contestation of memorial forms necessarily productive? In the case of Korczak Ziolkowski's Crazy Horse memorial,

intended as a brash challenge to the hegemonic 'white' American history found at nearby Mount Rushmore, and one that reasserts Native American claims to the terrain, Doss finds the end product to ultimately fall short of its lofty pretensions. In contrast to the relative lack of American Indian involvement in this case, the Danzas Indigenas memorial in Baldwin Park is for Doss a much more successful attempt to address America's multi-ethnic history. She attributes the value of the memorial not so much to the structure itself as to the debates it triggered, in which pro-immigrant groups successfully fended off an anti-immigration backlash from those white Americans staking a sole claim to the borderland area of Baldwin Park. Doss' positive assessment of the 'third space' (373) opened up here neatly sums up her broader aspiration for *memorial mania* to be 'accompanied by a critical consideration of historical memory' (363) – a plea, in effect, for memorials to play a role in participatory, pluralistic civic culture.

Doss' elegant and perceptive prose makes *Memorial Mania* a true pleasure to read, but her important book is much more than just that. Her analysis of individual memorials is frequently excellent, blending detailed close reading with attention to the range of emotive investments that Americans make in memorial forms. By taking seriously the feelings that drive memorialization in the United States, Doss helps to explain the connection between collective identity and the practice of memorial making. As Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche have pointed out, the study of cultural memory must not lose sight of memory's embededness in social networks (2002: 4), and *Memorial Mania* does justice to this by demonstrating how an emotive shared language of memorialization gives rise to (often disparate) constructions of American identity. As with Avril Maddrell's model of 'performatively embodied' landscapes in the *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* collection, Doss' theoretical model of 'manic' memorialization helps us to place memorial space within broader modes of cultural representation and ways of thinking about the past.

The only criticism that can be made of this otherwise brilliant and thought-provoking book is the assertion that 'manic' memorialization is a somehow peculiarly American phenomenon. Doss cites, for instance, the practice of making formal apologies for slavery at a corporate, state, and federal level in the US, suggesting that these aim to turn the vision of a tolerant America into an inclusive national project (291). But this kind of expedient apology culture is hardly exclusive to America; similar apologies have been made in the UK for Britain's role in the slave trade, and successive Australian prime ministers have apologized publicly for the treatment of aboriginals in recent years. By the same token, the acts of memorial destruction and defacement Doss describes in chapter six are, if anything, reminiscent of more unsavoury responses to the continued presence of Francoist iconography in Spain and sites of National Socialist persecution in Germany. Ultimately, there is little case for limiting such a compelling theoretical approach to America in light of these transnational parallels in the making and disputing of memorials.

A final consideration that would have merited further attention in both books is the distinction between virtual and physical space. *Memorial Mania* addresses virtual spaces of remembrance alongside three-dimensional sites, but of course only the latter is likely to be a sensory, bodily experience. Visitors, after all, choose to travel to and move around physical memorials, just as they do museums, making their engagement with space more profound in this case. On the other hand, virtual museums and memorials are much more accessible, a fact that carries its own implications for visitor demographic and experience. Doss, for one, seems convinced of the potential for virtual memorials such as the 'We Are Not Afraid' campaign launched in the aftermath of the 7 July 2005 London bombings to create the kind of 'creative critical space' (181) she desires of physical memorials, even if she acknowledges that Americans are drawn to the latter (51-52). Attributing this to the 'affectively enlarged dimensions of contemporary American culture' is not entirely convincing given the national paradigm's limitations, but in treating the fetishization of authentic experience as a cultural context Doss certainly asks the right questions of why actively visiting a site of memory retains an appeal. Elizabeth Anderson and her co-editors, by contrast, rather overlook the specific interest of tangible spaces by arranging the chapters around Pierra Nora's looser definition of *lieux de mémoire* (see Nora 1996), only hinting in a footnote to the introduction that physical landscapes may also carry emotive attachments with them (xiii, fn. 1). In addressing the specifically embodied quality of visiting memorials, scholarship can surely stand to benefit from dialogue

with museum studies research, given that the museum too presents a 'spatial and spectatorial' mode of experiencing the past (Crawley 2012: 13).

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Sophia Labadi and Colin Long (eds), *Heritage and Globalisation*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010, paperback £25.99, pp. xii+230

In the foreword to *Heritage and Globalisation*, the series editors suggest that the interdisciplinary and international field of heritage studies is now well established. Certainly, current literature indicates that heritage is a growing topic of intellectual enquiry, professional regulation, and public debate. Echoing what in museum studies has been conceptualized as a shift from questions about 'museum methods' to the 'purposes of museums' (Vergo 1989: 3), the 'new' or 'critical' heritage studies has emerged as a discipline focusing less on the preservation and management of sites and monuments and more, as it states in the book's opening pages, on heritage 'as a social and political construct' (xi). It is within this broad field – the *critical* heritage studies – that this collection of eleven essays is positioned. The choice of contributors reflects the diverse areas that have informed the development of the field including anthropology, archaeology, law, tourism studies, and urban history, as well as heritage industry specialists.

While globalization is a notoriously slippery concept, editors Long and Labadi clearly seek to ground contributors' use of the term and set limits to the book's approach. Globalization is taken to mean 'the greater [economic and political] interaction of the nations of the world' and the 'volume analyses the politics, policy and practice of cultural heritage at the global level' (2). Over three parts, essays examine and critique the role that transnational organizations have played in defining a global heritage perspective (Part I); the inclusion of cultural heritage in the global economy through tourism (Part II); and its use (predominantly through international development policy) to mediate key global problems such as poverty and environmental crisis (Part III).

A notable strength of the book is its emphasis on exploring the entanglement of the discourses and practices of global heritage with local specificities. This is not only addressed by individual chapters (for example, Meskell or Lafrenz on clashes between official and local-population heritage values), but more generally through the juxtaposition of varied analytic approaches. This includes empirically grounded case-studies of UNESCO World Heritage sites (Beazley, Winter, Salazar, Lafrenz); reflexive accounts of heritage work (van Krieken-Pieters, Meskell); and analysis of international systems of declarations, conventions, and protocols surrounding the protection and conservation of cultural heritage (Askew, Labadi, Bortolotto). The implications of this approach seem twofold.

First, by seeking to understand heritage within specific socio-cultural contexts, the book agitates for the greater incorporation of locally informed perspectives in the 'ideological' and 'practical' work of key institutional actors comprising the global heritage field (15). Long and Labadi sum up this commonality as an argument for 'the importance of a holistic approach […] that integrates heritage conservation with sustainable human development strategies centred around local population needs and views' (13-14). Second, insight is provided into how claims to 'global' or 'world' heritage are enacted and negotiated amongst diverse stakeholders. Thus, chapters extend the editors' view of 'globalisation as context' (2-4) and begin to point (albeit implicitly) towards alternative understandings. In particular, those of the global – and globalized heritage – as process (Daugbjerg and Fibiger 2011). Illustrating this shift, for example, is Beazley's chapter, which traces the nomination of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Japan) onto the World Heritage List, unearthing the 'multivalent' meanings that this site has come to assume as it has been transformed into global heritage. In doing so, Beazley foregrounds some of the tensions, paradoxes, and indeterminacies to play out during the acquisition of this status.

One such tension – and of particular significance for museums given the long-standing association of these institutions with the nation-state – is the interplay between 'universalisms' and 'nationalisms' in the global heritage field. It is argued, particularly effectively by Beazley and Askew who enter into sustained dialogue, that nation-states have not been superseded by global systems but have emerged as *especially* powerful actors; actors who utilize transnational heritage instruments (whether this be standards for heritage tourism or World Heritage lists) for their own political ends and nationalistic agendas. According to Askew, it is not 'any dominant global institutional structure or discourse of heritage classification' but the nation-state which is 'the real locus of power and exploitation in the global heritage game' (22). Paradoxically, as these and other chapters foreground, connecting heritage to inclusive and tolerant (or 'universal') ideals may be evoked, yet simultaneously undermined, as nation-states are provided with the legitimacy to determine 'authentic heritage' (Labadi, Bortolotto) or 'collective memory' (Beazley) in restrictive or even exclusionary ways.

While links between heritage and museum studies are clearly evident – heritage is, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006: 161) has suggested, a mode of cultural production essentially museological in character – it is useful to consider how these fields may *not* be entirely alike. Intangibility, as discussed in the book, has come to be considered a key characteristic of global heritage, indicative of aspirations to preserve cultural diversity. While it could be argued that objects have been decentred in museums through, for instance, the increasing digitalization of collections or emphasis on the provision of 'experience', the tangibility (or materiality) of collections remains central to museological practices of display, exchange, and collaboration. Indeed, the role of the museum in global processes has historically been expressed through the materiality of its collections (Prösler 1996: 22). It was a sense of how globality relates to the material and aesthetic qualities of heritage that seemed less evident throughout the chapters.

Additionally, beyond Winter's revision of dominant concepts of tourists to take into account non-Western markets, questions about the reception of global heritage sites by visitors did also not figure largely. Both omissions would seem to stem from the contributors' predominant focus on techno-bureaucratic systems of heritage production.

It is, however, from this focus that the value of this book emerges. Beyond showing heritage to be inherently political and contested terrain (a by now well-established perspective within museum studies), these chapters unearth the ideological, political, and representational work undertaken – yet often masked – by claims of globality. Transferred to museum studies, these insights likewise encourage critical analysis of the cultural work undertaken by global aspirations (for instance, the 'world' or 'universal museum' concept), as well the interface of global claims with those rooted in alternative understandings including regionalisms or nationalisms. Such lines of questioning elicit, as is argued in the book (most notably through Salazar's consideration of heritage tour-guide work through the concept of 'glocalisation'), nuanced readings of 'how processes of globalisation and localisation are intimately intertwined' (144). Examining such processes is surely pertinent given that tensions between global homogenization and local differentiation is a defining characteristic of the contemporary museum field. Thus, the book offers rich insight into key debates relevant for those considering the shifting nature of contemporary museums within the global heritage field.

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Robert R. Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World; Renewal, irrelevance or collapse?* London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009, paperback £24.99, pp. xvi+208

Stirring the (museological) possum!!
An intellectual activist's treatise for ensuring the survival, relevance and resilience of the twenty-first century's museums.

> *'The future of everything we have accomplished since our intelligence evolved will depend on the wisdom of our actions over the next few years'* (28).

> *'[I]ndividual staff members can be insightful and innovative – yet these qualities may never be translated into institutional reality'* (19).

Stirring the possum is an old Australian colloquialism that probably needs some explanation outside the Southern Continent and New Zealand. So: if you deliberately, or just accidently, disturb the daytime sleep of this particular variant of our 'cuddly' nocturnal marsupials (*trichosurus vulpecula*), you are apt to induce a hissing, spitting, scratching or

staring attack response. The possum will then probably scamper away to some safer more familiar bolthole further up the tree or deeper into the roof-space of your house.

Australians, and I suspect long-term museum professional and author, Canadian Dr Robert Janes, regularly enjoy stirring the metaphorical possum of social discourse and established convention.

In his 2009 publication, *Museums in a Troubled World; renewal, irrelevance or collapse?*, Dr Janes has dared to poke the 'sleepy museum possum' with some very pointed and unsettlingly sharp sticks. Considering the urgent and ongoing problems of our 'troubled world', many of us, deeply immured in daily museum activities, are probably in need of his wake-up call, his identification of the challenges and his suggestions for change.

With a lifetime of experience gleaned from an unusual mix of museum roles and academic disciplines, from the boreal forests of the remote northern Canada to the urban conglomeration of Calgary, and international cyberspace as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, Robert Janes brings us the benefits of a passionate museum insider's hindsight, measured against the outsider's broader perspective of social impact, relevance and value. Compressing his complex understanding of the issues facing twenty-first century museums into 200+ pages is something of a tour-de-force.

Janes draws the reader into this complex mix of principles, practicalities and priorities through the use of imaginative narrative and myth; cogent analysis of the museum's potential to engage with contemporary social issues; examples of excellent museum practice from around the world; the search for resilience and the raising of contentions about the social role and impact of museums and galleries now and in the future – 'The mindful museum'.

Janes is not alone in his views. He quotes extensively from a wide range of intellectuals, commentators and practitioners and draws important analogies and connections that may not be obvious to everyone. Even the highly respected Elaine Hermann-Gurian in her Foreword to the book admits to finding it 'useful to meander into places that Bob has found interesting and to try to parse the connections that he so plainly sees. Each of the possible course corrections he offers is unexpected, interesting and worth contemplating' (xv). She also describes it as an 'intriguing book so stock full of ideas and good quotes that I find I have to read and then reread each paragraph and think about it before going on' (xvi).

In this respect, the Prologue to the seven main chapters is the particularly important tangential, mystical and entertaining 'pointed stick' he employs to stir us from our general somnolence. Are we stewards or spectators?

Through the First Nation's account of the deliberations of the Great Council of All Animals, the fictional dreams of a curator and the disenchantment of an exhibition technician, Janes makes it abundantly clear that the relevance and thus the sustainability of the museum as a concept, an artefact and a reality sits squarely in the hands and the sensibilities of museum professionals and their boards of governance.

He argues very cogently against the recent wholesale adoption by museums of corporate business tools and marketplace values. He stresses that they have been designed to deliver efficiency around an ever more refined product and do not make allowances for the complex multilayered understandings, continuous research and individual dialogues endemic to the acquisition, care of and presentation of multi-various museum collections.

Along with Eric Hobswarn, he reiterates, as we are all too painfully aware, that 'the future is obscure'. However, in responding to the uncertainty and anxiety of our collective existence, Janes posits that museums are 'true agents of a civil society that transcends vanity architecture, attendances and consumption'. For him, this key opportunity, as a 'true agent of a civil society', must be recognised and responded to if the potential of museums to engage with contemporary social issues is to be realised. Without engagement there is no relevance; without relevance survival is chancy at best: 'Museums have no choice but to confront the ambiguities, complexities and paradoxes that make them what they are' (150).

Quoting from the work of Canadian political scientist Thomas Homer-Dixon, he elaborates on the 'five tectonic stresses that are accumulating deep underneath the surface of our societies' (28) – population stress; energy stress; environmental stress; climate stress and economic stress. Through targeted subheadings he outlines 'our lethal footprint', 'our uncontrollable consumption' and 'our retreat to the temple'.

Earlier on in the book, Janes poses a critical question about whether museums are 'performers' or 'learners'. Clearly they can be both or either or neither. Performance is continuously refined repetition with agreed limits; learning is taking chances and risking failure in order to reach beyond established boundaries. Throughout the text, he ignites our optimism with the possibilities of taking up the unmet potential of museums as 'learners'.

Dr Janes freely admits that his commentary relates substantially to museums in Northern America, those that he knows best. However, he does go international; to Scotland, the UK and Australia to cite some of the examples of museums and organizations that have stepped forthrightly into addressing and acting on issues of contemporary concern.

Museums have, in Janes' view, a responsibility to probe our humanness if they are to justify their long-held claims as 'custodians of our collective memory and knowledge'. He outlines five assumptions that underpin his deeply held concerns – concerns drawn from his own experience and his wide readings in the field of museological literature, philosophy and social commentary. These 'sobering assumptions' form the platform from which the subsequent chapters spring: 'It's a jungle in here!', 'Debunking the marketplace', 'Searching for resilience', 'The mindful museum' and lastly 'Museums: stewards or spectators?' The chapter titles alone should be enough to pique your interest and forestall the temptation to retreat from the challenge.

Whether you are a museum studies student, a museum worker, a volunteer, a director or a board member, this book is for you. It is not one that can be consumed in one sitting. It needs your input and your openness. In some places it may raise your intellectual hackles or may seem inordinately difficult to comprehend or implement. Don't give up. This book has a long-term trajectory. Its 15 pages of notes and bibliography are an invaluable reference source. Its iconoclasm and its search for new meanings are matched in the chapter on 'The mindful museum' by its helpful directions for overcoming inertia and despair.

To give Robert Janes the last word;

> Resistance and independence of thought are as essential to renewal as is the quality of hope. And there's some plain truth about hope that bears repeating, in the words of James Kunstler:
>
> "Hope is not a consumer product. You have to generate your own hope. You do that by demonstrating to yourself that you are brave enough to face reality and competent enough to deal with the circumstances that it presents. How we will manage to uphold a decent society in the face of extraordinary change will depend on our creativity, our generosity and our kindness''. (184-5)

Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania Patricia Sabine

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Amy Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty: Art Museums in Industrial Britain*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2012, £48.95, 288pp, 16 figures.

Art museums were among the most prominent and yet enigmatic new institutions of Victorian towns, and in this book Amy Woodson-Boulton manages to make them considerably less enigmatic, exploring and evaluating their logic, and showing how widely that logic was followed or resisted. Moreover, this is a book which takes both the institutions and their constituent art seriously, and manages the difficult task of synthesizing different types of analysis in order to understand what art museums actually did. Focusing on Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, and Manchester City Art Gallery, the book is able both to grasp the detail of specific case studies and acknowledge the contingency and variation apparent on the ground, while also showing and exploring the common concerns, ideas and problems affecting most provincial art museums at the time.

Woodson-Boulton considers a broadly chronological range of aspects of art museums. She starts with the campaigns to create them and their original foundations, and then covers the debates over Sunday opening which took place at all three museums. She then turns her

attention to the art collected and displayed by these museums, examining both the patterns of collecting and also analysing individual paintings from each museum's collection in some detail; and follows this up with an exploration of the ways in which the collections were mediated to the public through guidebooks, as well as in art criticism of the time and since. Her final chapter and epilogue show how the prevailing concerns of the Victorians were slowly undermined and then completely swept away by new attitudes to art and society brought about by Modernism in art, and increasing democracy. It is particularly useful to have some examination of the fate of the Victorian museum in the twentieth century, because so often 1914 seems to mark the end of historical consideration of museums.

The book argues that art museums were primarily a Ruskinian-inspired (though not always, in fact rarely Ruskin-endorsed) attempt to heal industrial urban society by providing contact with nature, experience and narratives which opened up truth and beauty to the masses. Such a bald statement of the argument does not really do justice to the subtlety and synthesizing power of the analysis provided here; it is not just that museums were deployed in a programme of social reform, as others have pointed out, but the detail of the way in which art museums were to reform. The close analysis of guidebooks reveals that paintings were almost never discussed as paintings, but as windows onto experiences which could purify through their creation of spiritual beauty and truthful nature. The paintings, however, sometimes resisted such readings, by troubling the distinctions between nature and industry, the immaterial and the material. This discussion inevitably leads to questions about what the visitors thought, both of individual paintings, and of the institutions themselves, rather than just what the galleries' committees thought the paintings would do, which is not attempted here. However, this is a notoriously difficult issue to research for the nineteenth century, which would have drawn space and energy from the sustained analysis of the committees' actions and intentions.

One of the most compelling parts of the book is the discussion of Sunday opening debates. Woodson-Boulton suggests that such debates revolved around the ideal middle-class domestic Sunday, spent at home in the presence of uplifting art and culture, and that those in favour of Sunday opening wished to provide such an experience for the working classes in the art museum. Thus the public space of the museum was reimagined as a moralized, domesticated environment that was the next best thing to the bourgeois home, offering a viewing of art as a religious experience, in an attempt to counter the arguments of the Sabbatarians. The Sabbatarians, meanwhile, insisted that only the actual home, however unappealing, was the appropriate place to spend those parts of Sunday not engaged in church or chapel going; and they refuted the equivalence of art and religion. The volume of evidence marshalled here is convincing, and this understanding of the public and private nature of urban space will be of interest to those studying Victorian towns. However, I am not convinced that this was the only way in which Sunday opening was rationalized. Proponents also invoked the Continental Sunday, which was unashamedly public in its modes of activity, with all classes occupying streets, parks and galleries in a decorous and seemly, yet enjoyable way – the public nature of a Sunday in France was contrasted with the British Sunday spent either at home or at the pub. In some ways this rested on bourgeois fears about the superior sophistication of other European countries, which surfaced again in the late-twentieth-century debate about drinking habits in Britain and abroad.

The book is beautifully written in clear and accessible prose, with a wealth of detail and depth of research. It is nicely illustrated and an attractive volume altogether, though it does have annoyingly hard to use endnotes. Woodson-Boulton finishes by suggesting that art museums, founded in a spirit of idealism even if that idealism was often compromised, continue to retain the potential to 'change the way we see the world', and thus to change the world; thus the history of art museums is employed partly as a way to help us think about the roles and potentials of art museums today. This is an important book for anyone interested in museum history, Victorian culture and the changing role of art in society.

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