

Book Reviews

Lisanne Gibson and John Pendlebury (eds.), *Valuing Historic Environments*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, hardback, £55.00, pp.xii + 220

This collection of ten, wide-ranging essays explores various aspects of heritage, and more specifically, conundrums in heritage management in contemporary, culturally pluralist communities. With topics as diverse as street art and graffiti, social housing, monuments, seaside resorts and the Country House (capital letters mandatory!), this collection presents many thought-provoking and fresh concepts and approaches to heritage. Like the heritage field itself, the authors represent a range of academic disciplines, from archaeology and geography, to architecture and history, as well as contributions from heritage practitioners. From the creativity of these essays, one senses that many of these authors are boundary riders: testing the limits of their respective fields and taking what could be perceived as a backwards-looking field firmly into future territory.

Emerging from a series of workshops and presentations as part of an inter-disciplinary research cluster organized by the editors of the book, central to this collection is an interrogation of what constitutes value. Rejecting any idea that value is intrinsic to places or objects, the editors state in their introduction, 'all of the authors contributing to this collection proceed on the basis that concepts of cultural, historical, or social value are culturally and historically constructed' (p.1). This instantly complicates previously-held concepts integral to heritage practice such as the primacy of place and the dominance of expert values in how conservation knowledge is defined. In setting these new co-ordinates for the heritage field, the introduction teases out its inherent paradoxes and constraints but also points to its potential to facilitate democratic dialogues about what matters to communities. Whilst heritage can operate for elitist values or self-interest on the part of communities seeking to protect property values in Britain for example, it can also assist Indigenous people in struggles of recognition and self-determination. In the introduction specific examples are used to both theorise and provide practical direction, which characterises this collection as a whole. Stonehenge is an apt example. The editors show how, as a place whose 'enigmatic nature has made it prone, and suitable, to multiple interpretations' (p.5), Stonehenge and its meanings have been subject to ongoing contestation, resulting in regimes of control and exclusion of competing, usually non-conformist, values. Stonehenge reinforces 'the cultural and historical specificity of heritage' (p.4), already highlighted as one of the book's recurring themes, which is explored in the essays through a multitude of cases and contexts.

The first grouping of essays 'Values and Heritage Stewardship' opens with David Lowenthal's impassioned *Patrons, Populists, Apologists: Crises in Museum Stewardship*. This broad sweep of issues currently confronting museums is probably the essay with most appeal to those in the museum field, although many may quibble with the author's characterization of museums that identify as agents for social change as 'avowedly didactic, partisan, chauvinistic' (p.25). Many contemporary museum truisms are questioned in this dense account of crisis and dilemma. Indeed, strategies that are identified elsewhere in the book as positive in regards to dealing with pluralism are tightly questioned here. Close probing continues with Laurajane Smith's *Deference and Humility: The Social Values of the Country House* and Peter Howard's *Historic Landscapes and the Recent Past: Whose History?*, two essays that scrutinise elitism, class and expertise and the very real political and social ramifications of these in heritage practice.

Part Two explores cultural landscapes, a term used consciously to highlight everyday, overlooked and therefore potentially undervalued places and objects. Both Lisanne Gibson and

John Schofield interrogate the potential of approaches and programmes that recognise personal and community articulation of meanings and values - which Schofield describes with the interesting terminology of 'intimate engagement' (p.93) or a 'symmetrical approach' (p.94) in a pitch to encompass multiple perspectives in heritage management. The final two essays in this grouping - John K Walton and Jason Wood's look at Blackpool 'the world's first working class resort' (p.115) and Tracey Avery's discussion of street art in Melbourne's laneways - focus on places and practices whose legitimacy as heritage is disputed.

The final part of the book hones in on the arena of housing. Despite this seemingly tight ambit, the essays here introduce another suite of ideas to an already rich supply. Peter Borsay's essay *The Georgian House: The Making of a Heritage Icon* traces the processes by which the Georgian House has become the epitome of heritage. As he ably illustrates, this icon was 'made' and mostly by factors 'extraneous to the object itself' (p.158). Borsay underscores the importance of studying the history of heritage itself and how its meaning is subject to broad social, economic and political processes and shifts. The final two essays move along the continuum from Georgian architecture to social housing in the north of England. John Pendlebury, Tim Townshend and Rose Gilroy consider the case of the Byker estate in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A mid-century, urban renewal project of a traditional working class area, the Byker project was at the vanguard of what became known as 'community architecture' and has long been considered an exemplary project in this field, as well as an award-winning work of architecture by Ralph Erskine. Interviews with residents, housing managers, community workers and heritage professionals undertaken at various stages in the heritage listing process form the basis of their essay. Byker proves to be an excellent vehicle for examining many of the themes of the entire collection. As the authors conclude after a consideration of the complex issues at play 'whilst listing does not necessarily align with the values that underpin broader conceptions of specialness, maybe it is the best proxy measure we have' (p.199). The case emphasises how the processes around heritage listing are hugely important to whether it achieves local credibility.

Misunderstandings of heritage abound in the community; its practice is stymied by the political and administrative contexts within which it operates and the bureaucratic instruments it uses seem to create as many difficulties as they address. In unpacking these issues through a range of fascinating examples, this collection offers cause for consideration by heritage practitioners and academics alike.

Museum of Brisbane, Australia

Jo Besley

Hooper-Greenhill, E., *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, paperback, £24.99, pp. xviii + 231

This book reports on four studies undertaken by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) which was established in the Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester in 1999 with funding from the (then) Museum and Galleries Commission (MGC), which worked to support UK museums at arms length from government, and the university.

The 1997 advent of a Labour government led to the state becoming more centrally directive towards museums and other cultural organizations, especially focusing on accountability and instrumental demands for an increase in school usage and socially inclusive and access activities. The demands arose from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), which superseded the MGC and is concerned with policy and strategy for the sector. It is overseen by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The studies described were large impact projects carried out for either the MLA or the DCMS and, as such, were evaluations of government funded policy and strategy initiatives, rather than the familiar, smaller scale, institutionally focused evaluations which have been commonly carried out in the UK museum sector in recent decades. The studies involved many people in government, museums and schools and attempt to illuminate the learning outcomes of visits to museums (mainly), libraries and archives in the UK. The first study (2002) was concerned with developing 'measuring learning' criteria for the general museum audience. The other three (2003, 2004 and 2005) implemented, in England, the methodology designed in the first to structure research tools and guide analyses when examining school visits to museums. It is claimed that they comprise a

single data set.

The author was director of RCMG from 1999 to 2006. RCMG is interested in the notion of the social agency of arts and culture and, to some degree, functions as an advocate for these ideas. The study reports are 'book-ended' by chapters outlining the author's thoughts on theories related to culture, society, learning and education linked to notions of the museum institution as a 'key site for learning in post modernity'. I found the use of these theories tended to remain vague and abstract. The book is not an easy read either as there are repetitions. The language used was at times tortuous so that we read of, for example, learning outcomes, learning agenda, learning partnerships, community learning, a cultural theory of cultural learning and so on. This could be because of the influence of the jargon in government documents that the RCMG team digested during their work. However, the diligence of the research effort and the exemplary graphical representations of data shine through.

The first study – the Learning Impact Research Project – referred to the work of Guy Claxton, who writes on the psychology of growth and change in everyday life, to derive very general characteristics of learning which were then categorized into five sets and named outcomes. The term 'generic' was borrowed from a 2002 paper – Education for Citizenship in Scotland – and, so, Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) emerged. The trouble is that these government approved GLOs are so general that anyone who is conscious and aware is bound to be providing evidence of one or the other of them. They are not particularly related to museum contexts so the question of how museums might be special places for learning when compared to other places where GLOs might be exhibited is in doubt. A positive feature of their promotion is that, as they were, and are, used by many museum, library and archive staff inexperienced in visitor evaluation, they may have served as an introduction to the well established field of visitor studies. A negative feature is that as both in-house studies and evaluation commissions, because they are often linked to funding, tended to specify the use of GLOs, exploratory and creative studies focused on the needs of particular institutions and the description of the naturally occurring behaviour of museum visitors may have been neglected.

Three studies in 2003, 2004 and 2005 used the GLOs to examine the impact of special programmes, many designed with social inclusion and access in mind, of workshops, drama, role play, drawing and so on, which were supported by special funding from either MLA or DCMS. The programmes involved the pupils in high levels of physical activity. The sample of both museums and schools is not representative of museum school interactions as it looked at less than 8% of all English museums; towards half of the schools were from the lowest 20% of deprived areas in the country and three quarters of them were primary or special schools. Thus, these reports do not give a national picture of the everyday impact of the work of museum education departments and the author acknowledges this in the final chapters.

The GLO most valued by teachers and pupils was that of enjoyment and inspiration, potentially leading to creativity. However as the final chapters state that GLOs function in an integrated manner, influencing each other, it is difficult to understand how the research could have employed each GLO with clarity. The last chapter refers to condescending nineteenth century accounts of museums being thought of as civilizing influences on the less privileged and I did feel that the projects described had twenty-first-century echoes of that theme.

This book forms an historical record of a government's aspirations to impose a universal assessment measure of the truly complex attribute of human learning in order to divine the effectiveness of educational initiatives which unwind over a few hours in the school life of a child or that of the average museum, library and archive visitor. The interactions of individual museums, libraries or archives with their visitors cannot be compared in this way. Collecting, making, being curious and inquisitive are human traits. Perhaps an appropriate museum pedagogy involves helping us to consider the evidence of such traits attentively.

Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects, American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800-1940*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, hardcover, £30.95, pp.xii + 310

How is gender connected to culture? What is 'masculine' and 'feminine' and what does that mean for individuals? Are there 'male' and 'female' ways of collecting? Dianne Sachko Macleod's new book is not afraid of big questions, and has the broad scope as well as the grasp of detail to answer them. This ambitious and significant book gives us a framework to engage with for the development of women as collectors. It encompasses a 140-year period during which women as art collectors moved from extreme rarities to a commanding position exercising 'matronage' over large cultural institutions (though she also demonstrates that once the institutions were up and running the women founders were often written out). Over this period she asserts that there was an identifiably 'feminine' style of collecting and that collecting was liberating for women; they used their private collecting activities as a way of entering the public sphere and even shaping culture.

The book is organised into five chapters which broadly outline a chronology of women's collecting. The first looks at antebellum America and finds few women collectors, and those few controversial and openly transgressive, such as Eliza Bowen Jumel. By the second chapter, which looks at the postbellum period, Macleod argues that the prevailing gender norms restricted women further from making their collections public, and it is clearly true that her collectors either stayed single, or waited until they were widowed, to enjoy the autonomy and free disposal of their incomes. There is a substantial emphasis in this chapter on the psychological uses of art collecting, as creative play which sharpens the sense of self; this, it is argued, was a necessary step towards the later confidence to go public. Chapter three then moves on to the collecting practices of the 'New Woman' around 1900-1920, looking at a number of women who were positively proselytizing in their advocacy of art in the public sphere. Chapter four looks at women collectors' relationship to modernism, which arguably encompassed a backlash against the women patrons and champions of culture. There were notable conflicts over the purpose of art and art institutions, the style of display, and the venerating of function over form, which Macleod argues were fundamentally gendered. Finally the last chapter, gathering together some of the biggest characters in a book full of big characters, examines the explicit questioning of gender and sexuality, looking at women who deliberately used art collecting as a way of reformulating themselves in the first half of the twentieth century.

Outlined thus, it sounds like a schematic and reductive approach, yet this is an exhaustively researched book packed with telling empirical details. It also embodies a subtle, theoretically informed and convincing argument. On methodology, for example, Macleod argues for a case study approach that gives 'concrete examples rather than sweeping generalisations', while including in the discussion as many comparative individuals as necessary to avoid creating 'a canon of exceptional women collectors'; though this is, in fact, very much what appears in the first chapter when there are simply very few women art collectors. Macleod also, and most importantly, sets out to expand the discussion of collecting and gender, and in doing so certainly gives other scholars in this field much to ponder. She endorses the view that there are 'masculine' and 'feminine' styles of collecting, as suggested, albeit briefly and usually for contemporary collectors, by Cheang, Belk and Wallendorf, Martin and Pearce.¹ She is, though, quick to point out that these styles were not necessarily restricted to men and women; she gives numerous examples of men collecting in a 'feminine' style and women collecting in a 'masculine' style. The 'feminine' style of collecting, according to Macleod, does not discriminate between fine art and decorative arts and crafts. It finds objects most meaningfully displayed in a domestic setting, and tries to create a simulacrum of domesticity in other display settings such as art galleries, does not set out to impose order and meaning on objects through cataloguing and categorising but rather seeks a psychological relationship between the object, its material and aesthetic qualities, and the owner's subjectivity and identity. Again, a great deal of evidence is gathered to support this. However, I remain to be totally convinced by this characterisation of gendering in collecting. Much, though not all, of what we know about these collections comes from comments about them made by others (in fact, the collectors' own ruminations on their collections are very enlightening, but naturally rather thin on the ground). Might it not be that it is the commentators' framing, rather than the collectors' actions, that are gendering the

collections? How free were women, both in terms of their psychological identity and in terms of practicalities of money and space, to collect as they wished? This last question is partly answered by Macleod's restricting of her study to very affluent women who collected art and decorative objects. While this focus was clearly necessary for the book to be workable, it would be interesting and instructive to consider both women collecting in other areas, such as natural history, and non-elite women and their collecting activities. These groups, I suspect, would not exhibit the same gender characteristics in their collecting and, additionally, would they seek access to public space for their collections and try to develop the public role of women in culture in the same way? Work by Lianne McTavish on women's involvement in the New Brunswick Museum at a similar period, featuring the upper middle classes, does appear to show a link between museum involvement and concern for women's access to public life, but this link would clearly benefit from being tested in further research.² So this book will stimulate debate around gender and collecting, and is particularly valuable in historicising this debate. It is beautifully written and benefits from full illustration. It is destined to become a key text in this field.

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Notes

- ¹ S. Cheang, 'The Dogs of Fo: Gender, Identity and Collecting,' in Anthony Sheldon, ed., *Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other*, Horniman Museum and Gardens / Museu Antropologico da Universidade de Coimbra, London, 2001, 55-72; Belk and Wallendorf, 'Of Mice and Men: Gender Identity in Collecting', in Susan Pearce, ed. *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp.240-253; Susan Pearce, 'Making up is hard to do', *Museums Journal* 93 (12), December 1993, 25-7; Paul Martin, *Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self*, Leicester University Press, Leicester and New York, 1999, pp67-74
- ² Lianne McTavish, 'Strategic Donations: Women and Museums in New Brunswick, 1862-1930', *Journal of Canadian Studies* 42, 2 (Spring 2008), 1-24

Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, Ruth B Phillips (eds), *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2006, hardcover, £55.00, 320pp

Part way through reading this book I paused to recollect when it was that I last thoroughly relished an object, really enveloped it with all my senses: feeling and smelling it, listening to it, tasting it even. During more than 20 years of museum work I have dealt with and thought much about material culture; but I confess, I have frequently relied purely on my eyes to do so. Even worse, I have also allowed photographs of objects to stand in for the real thing. As Elizabeth Edwards, one of this volume's editors has pointed out elsewhere, "there is a sense in which the museum object becomes a sum of its photographs" (p.216). My confession is not unusual, and one of the aims of this book is to change curatorial habits, or at least to challenge the myopic rule of the eye.

This dominance of sight over the other senses has also, it is contended here, perpetuated an unreformed colonial perspective on indigenous cultures. Colonialism was, of course, profoundly material, with "many of the commodities sought for colonial consumption ...[being] attractive to the senses" (p.16). Think of tea and coffee, tobacco, spices and silk. But Europeans simultaneously derided the senses they considered 'lower' than sight, holding that non-Westerners were more sensuous than themselves, more prone to live a life of the body than the mind. In gathering sensually suggestive objects that have then been valued purely in visual terms, museums have "effectively [and unhelpfully,] institutionaliz[ed] Western assumptions about how we apprehend objects through cultural processes" (p.3).

Sensible Objects certainly manages to stimulate all the senses through its range of examples. Kathryn Linn Geurts and Elvis Gershon Adikah, for example, describe the shift in how West Africans drink water, now using manufactured glasses rather than the traditional calabash. One of Geurts and Adikah's interviewees, Mr. Sorkpor, explains how no longer using two hands represents the loss of a "feeling of balance which he associated with an overall sense

of pleasure and rejuvenation" (p.36). David Sutton on the other hand is concerned with the memory associated with practical cooking skills. Olfactory engagement is also the subject of Aldona Jonaitis' essay on the role of smoked fish and fermented oil amongst the Kwakwaka'wakw. As Jonaitis points out, the interlinked senses of taste and smell seem the most difficult for museums to deal with, because "one cannot, obviously, see taste or smell" (p.160). Certainly, with the possible exception of working farm museums, one thinks with a smile of the laughable attempts that museums and visitor centres have made to involve smells as part of their core experience.

The sense of sound is taken up in two other essays. Tim Barringer looks at how 'sonic spectacles' were used to promote the British Empire in Delhi and London just prior to the First World War. He makes his case for the further integration of music into the cultural history of empire through the example of aural spectacles, which though meant to shore up an invulnerable sense of the British Raj, nonetheless also hinted at its fragility, legible (or maybe audible) beneath the pageants' glittering surfaces. Sound, this time recreated within an exhibition, also provides an important strand in Diane Losche's account of the creation of the Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples at the American Museum of Natural History. For Losche, the not entirely successful results reveal an inherent tension in ethnographic displays between "the desire to see over an area as opposed to the desire to be immersed in a far-away space" (p.241).

Aside from a few such notable exceptions however, the last hundred years of increasingly professionalised museum work has forcibly separated objects from every one of our senses except sight. In part, this is because museums have attempted to halt, or at least slow down, changes in the material states of their objects. To achieve this, elaborate bureaucratized 'object handling' processes have been developed, policed by conservation scientists who oblige even researchers to handle objects wearing gloves. And at the same time, museum audiences have been discouraged from eating, drinking and being loud – effectively reducing them to eyes on legs. What has been lost, as this volume makes clear, is the power that lurks in museum objects that in any other context would naturally engage senses other than sight. The embodied experience and knowledge that comes only from the senses of touch, smell, and sometimes hearing, ends up, at best, being reflected in exhibition labels and audio-guides. And this despite further evidence from neuroscience, "that action and perception are closely allied, so that patterns of action deeply influence the manner in which we are sensitized to the world" (p.5). We feel our way around the world as well understand it by looking.

But things are changing and some of the contributors seem quite optimistic. For one thing, the political struggles around who controls ethnographic objects within museums has meant that members of the communities from which the objects originate have started 'taking the back', or at least reclaiming both their meaning and how they are handled. Some exhibition curators have also tried out innovative methods of display and installation to enable visitors to engage other senses than just sight. For Constance Classen and David Howes this represents the shift from an era of 'museums of sight' to another model (one based on the idea of contact, suggests Jeffrey David Feldman) in which visitors are able to interact more dynamically with objects, getting a "contextual understanding of the collection, without making a pretence of total sensory immersion" (p.220).

For the most part, this is a convincing argument, and some of the evidence supplied is certainly compelling. And yet, I confess that after setting the book down to return to plans for the next exhibition at Wellcome Collection, I still found myself eagerly returning to a dominantly visual paradigm. The changes described so clearly here are, I suspect, ultimately going to amount to modifications in a process of subtle evolution rather than revolution, and particularly the further away from ethnography and anthropology curators get. Sensible Objects will rightly help those who work in museums to broaden their horizons, encouraging them to explore how visitors' visual experiences can be supplemented by the engagement of their hands, ears and noses (their tongues even?). But in the end, museums will still fundamentally operate as palaces of the eye, predominantly woven around our endlessly fascinating visual encounters with the world.