

## Book Review

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**Ian Convery, Gerard Corsane and Peter Davis (eds.), *Displaced Heritage: Responses to Disaster, Trauma, and Loss*, Woodbridge : The Boydell Press, 2014, hardback, £60.00, pp. xx+337**

Number 16 in the International Centre for Cultural Studies' (Newcastle University) 'Heritage Matters' series, this comprehensive volume includes twenty-nine essays covering a range of themes, case studies and information from heritage specialists, lecturers, artists, scientists, researchers and consultants. With certain appeal for a variety of heritage professionals, disaster reconciliation people, natural heritage practitioners and museum and heritage students, the range and breadth of the text is set out in the preface by Kai Erikson and the endpiece by Phil O'Keefe. The term displacement, in this context, refers to the loss or 'rearrangement' of our natural or cultural heritage (this could occur through natural disaster or human involvement such as war, genocide or exploitation of natural resources). The preface deals with an examination of the term 'disaster', describing how natural disaster is considered only so when a man-made or cultural presence is caught in its path. Erikson extrapolates how pervasive disaster can be, therefore preventing it from being considered of as 'an event', and ascertains that its true meaning can only be understood once it is allowed to 'settle back into the larger flow of history'(xx).

Section one deals with tourism and heritage. Robert Stone provides a scholarly analysis of the emergence of the notion of 'thanatourism' (Seaton 2010) and its prevalence in postmodernity, questioning whether the privacy of death is being sequestered by tourism. The analysis establishes a feeling of cautiousness and accountability, which remained with me whilst considering subsequent essays, including the use of Foote, who explains that reconciliation processes at heritage sites involve 'rectification, designation, sanctification or obliteration' (Foote 2009:38-9). Stephen Miles problematises the memorialisation of battlefields using Hastings battlefield site as an example; lacking anything tangibly representational, Hastings nonetheless experiences a myriad of interpretations, some of which overlap temporally, creating a 'palimpsestic definition of space'(20). It is suggested that tourism can 'mitigate the effects of displacement' (24).

The effects of micro and macro heritage and/or its use in reconciliation is the focus of several of the case studies. Diana Walter's chapter examining peace building in the Western Balkans describes the 'top-down' reconciliation processes, which, in her opinion, have been largely unsuccessful. She reveals the work that many local initiatives and organisations have been doing on a more individual, essential level. Similarly, Shalini Sharma's valuable essay, which investigates the industrial disaster in Bhopal, demonstrates the complex tangle of state authority agendas with survivor needs. As well as exploring the intricacies of memorialisation, she suggests that the incorporation of survivors' wishes could feed into larger societal issues such as 'India's postcolonial memory project' (116).

Andrew Law provides a comprehensive exposé on humiliation heritage in China, revealing governmental methods of 'affectual storytelling' that are intended to construct an 'emotional homogeneity' (171) through education, galas, pageantry and even technological affectations such as 'awe inspiring architecture' (169). John Welshman, on the other hand, surveys a portion of child survivor testimonies of the Titanic disaster. Twenty-first century heritage discourse generally accepts oral history accounts as valuable to memory reconstruction and/or reconciliation and Welshman postulates that whilst some of the recorded accounts were at

times fanciful or implausible, he infers the value in these 'creative non-fiction' (149) accounts as contributing to the 'archaeology of memories' (149). It is interesting to consider that democratic societies normally distrust and refuse instances of macro-heritage that falsely represent or manipulate our beliefs but we make space for these individual accounts of public events that may also be 'inaccurate'. Also in China, Gerard Corsane researches the displacement of his family history; the author starts by introducing himself and his family heritage and proceeds then to tie in his ideas and opinions on heritage relocation with characters and places we have already 'got to know'. He stipulates that micro-history becomes displaced when it is considered as inconsequential but, 'when it is replaced, this heritage can add to the historical interest of an area' (61). This, and many subsequent chapters, use a travelogue method of research and delivery in which the reader accompanies the author on their journey. Aron Mazel's chapter retells his visit to Vilnius, the town where his Jewish predecessors once lived (and were murdered). His reminiscences and theories function like milestones, as if they were physically situated on that road where his family once lived. There's a poignancy and dynamism to his investigations as to why 'nostalgic sacredness' (Dargufiytė 2010:52) draws people back to their 'cultural and familial lands' (154). Busby, et al state that, 'Travelogue provides a vehicle for presenting the much broader social forces that converge in the author at the time of imagining and writing. Using narrative and the story provides an opportunity to address one of the limitations of positivism (Busby et al 2011). In his chapter, Jonathan Skinner describes his guided tour around the Maze Breaks prison in Northern Ireland, opening the story with a scene from artist Steve McQueen's film about the hunger strikes which took place there. For those who are familiar with the film, the memory of its imagery is haunting and places the reader at a visceral threshold to the chapter. He also uses the film introduction to highlight how Gerry Kelly's character has become 'streamlined through the media' (87). His visit recounts details of the mundane interior features, which we might not otherwise hear about, and Skinner makes some interesting points about tour guiding, closing the chapter with his finishing the film-viewing in the auditorium.

Filmmaker Ellie Land delivers an essay about animation documentary, offering some useful interview and testimony-collecting tips which could be valuable for those interested in oral history as well as pre-production, documentary filmmaking. Focusing on her film, 'The Other Side,' about displacement and reunification in Germany, she explains the appropriateness of the techniques she has chosen and the success of the documentary in many film festivals. However, considering the film deals with a diverse mix of local opinions on either side of the Wall it would have been valuable to have heard how the interviewees themselves received the film and indeed the opinions of German residents as a way of measuring its effectiveness.

Several chapters highlight the long-lasting and insidious effects of disaster and trauma, many of which are not accounted for or are bypassed by reconciliation methods. Rupert Ashmore sensitively considers three photography artists' portrayals of the subtle changes of the Cumbrian landscape caused by foot and mouth disease and how these changes have impacted tourism and local farming identity. Arthur McIvor's survey of asbestos disease victims and two flood-recovery essays (based in Australia and the UK) focus largely on the *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday history) involved in the aftermath and recovery processes of these disasters. In all of these, survivor testimonies describe the lasting memories of substances: 'dust, death and disability' (246). Sentimental images of mud-encrusted objects recovered by community collecting groups after the Queensland floods augment Jo Besely and Greame Were's observations. Takashi Harada's remarkable chapter, 'Earthquakes: People, Landscapes and Heritage in Japan', alludes strongly to the social life of objects and materials. Reading a *Lonely Planet* Japan travel guide, Harada notices the irony in the fact that most of the 'must-see' sites are in fact areas of natural beauty mainly all brought about by millions of years of seismic activity and 'only now do we enjoy those landscapes as "heritages"' (238). As the author notes, 'From the time that people settled in Japan, earthquakes must be regarded as a social force.' (238), and the philosophy behind this connection surely underscores and applies to so many heritage debates. Harada reports on scientific methods of earthquake prediction and dauntlessly suggests that 'Modern scientific explanations are no better than traditional folktales in forecasting where and when earthquakes will strike' (240). The author leaves you in a dizzying stance in which you are unsure whether to trust science or fable or whether you

should view natural beauty as an ancient calamity. It is a poignant account of the abstract relationship that those traumatised by earthquakes may have to their environment.

The last part of this volume deals with natural heritage. Özgün Emre Can delivers an interesting survey of the demise of the wolf and its folkloric depiction both chronologically and geographically. Pat Caplan's well-rounded examination of badger culling in the UK uses statistical information in relation to a wide range of observations surrounding the animal's iconic representation, the cultural landscape, farming identity and 'community othering' in relation to the pro and anti-cull groups.

Flicking through the index of this volume indicates just how perceptively compiled and thorough an understanding the editors have of it. We see the anticipated indexical content such as the names of places, animals and types of disasters but there are also terms which are explicitly cognisant of the breadth of intangibility involved in heritage interpretation. Under 'Power', for example, we see the words 'destructive, folklore and relationships'. Beneath 'Materials' we find, 'floods, sacred and undesirable', among others. With reference to Erikson's preface, many of these chapters deliver a wealth of transferrable ideas and information and function effectively as elemental parts of a bigger picture, so it pays to read around your area of interest. Displaced heritage is after all intangible and often needs to be unearthed from an assortment of different dimensions.

Lisa Gordon

## References

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