

(in)significance: a discussion about values and valuing in heritage

Friday 15 May 2015, Ann Harding Conference Centre, University of Canberra

Conveners: Tracy Ireland and Steve Brown

Symposium abstract. The notion of 'significance' is a central concept for heritage conservation in many parts of the world—it describes what the institutions of heritage choose to remember and what they choose to forget. Used in American historic preservation legislation from the late 19th century, and in the 1964 Venice Charter, in Australia the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1979) introduced the phrase 'places of cultural significance', a concept that emphasised meanings over monuments. Determining significance is a process of ascribing values—culturally constructed meanings or qualities attributed by individuals and groups to a heritage object, place or landscape. Valuing heritage has led to practices that typically list, rank and then privilege particular values—at world, national and local levels. At the symposium we hope to explore the history, theory and practical application of the concept of significance and broach the idea of insignificance.

NOTES ON SESSION 3: practice-led theory

Session 3
*Practice-led
theory*
14.00 – 15.30

What is the ongoing influence of modernist concepts of universal value?
How does significance assessment intersect with concepts of ethics,

Session 3 *practice-led theory*

Chair and Facilitator. Denis Byrne (Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney).

Speakers. Tim Sherratt (Associate Professor of Digital Heritage, University of Canberra); Geoff Hinchcliffe (Assistant Professor in Media and Graphic Design, University of Canberra);

Veronica Bullock. The point about curation as a form of selection that we can refine more. What has occurred to me after listening to the talks in this session is, as Denis suggested, there is a divide. My message was very serious. When I contrast that with the fun that the digital world presents, I wonder how can we make these two work together for this imaginary that we apparently need to build?

Tim Sherratt. Interestingly I want to critique my own aspect of fun and pick up on Tracy and Tim's points on ethics. I didn't really show the positive side of significance in terms of the uses of something like Trove. I want to issue a challenge. How should I

museums. What happens when those items get repatriated? Are the digital imprints kept in the museum? I am thinking of the particular case of Aboriginal human remains. I am wondering if the panel would like to comment to this issue?

Tracy Ireland. I am going to sidestep your question a little. I work with a number of people who study photographs from the past, often of Indigenous people. It has been

other arenas where heritage is very low on the priority list of what we need to sort

extent on a point made by Sharon, is that to share the expertise in a broad sense, including within academia, is to recognize that Heritage Studies is an apt structure for us to be doing what we do and for dealing with a number of different disciplines. I leave you with that thought. I want to respond to Nerrida's point about heritage as future. I did say I would not talk about time, but what I have done with my background research is bump into it. I have been shocked at how little we go into time. We refer to it all the time. Certainly the past for a future. Laurajane Smith would say that is part of the 'authorised heritage discourse'; that is, appealing to the future. Does the future exist? These are big questions that we could take by the horns. Geographers have covered this through notions of space and time, but heritage can add something different – not only time, but generations and place. This is an area for research.

Denis Byrne. We are 'eating', as it were, into afternoon tea time [ripples of laughter]. I will end the questions and discussion there. Please thank the panel. [Rapturous applause]

[A number of attendees who are employed by government heritage agencies got together over afternoon tea].

Session 3 - *Practice-led theory*

Facilitator: Denis Byrne

Tim Sherratt -

What happens when you make millions of newspaper articles, documenting 150 years of Australian history, freely available online? It's not just a matter of convenience — scale and access change the questions we can ask, the relationships we can form with the

Angelina Russo -

Increasingly, creative production is recognised as both the result of skilled practitioners and their connection to and participation in a networked society. Museums offer trusted authoritative environments through which to explore these new collaborations between creators and producers: to gather culturally diverse experiences and propose new models for co-creation and knowledge production. In this talk we explore how creative communities connect with museums to achieve innovative solutions by viewing museums as a laboratory for both conservation and new knowledge production.

Angelina Russo is the Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra. Prior to this she was Director, Higher Degrees Research in the School of Media and Communications (RMIT) (2010 - 2013) and a Chief Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence in Creative Industries and Innovation (2005 - 2011). Her research practice explores the intersections between cultural collections, media, and design. She is recognised for the research and practice she has undertaken in social media for museums and innovative participatory practices. She is currently developing a new stream of research which draws together design and making communities with museums.

Tim Winter -

This short presentation focuses on the different ways in which we might think about the political values that enmesh heritage. Within that broad theme some questions will be posed about how we might better conceptualise the political, where we look for it, and how we should think through understanding what constitutes a politics of heritage today.

Tim is Research Professor of Cultural Heritage at the Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Deakin University, Melbourne. Most of his working day is spent trying to figure out how cultural heritage features in issues like nationalism, diplomacy, sustainability, postcolonial identities and urban development. He has published widely on these themes and conducted research projects in a variety of contexts, including Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Kashmir, Qatar and China. Tim has been a Visiting Scholar at the University of Cambridge, The Getty Conservation Institute and University College London, Qatar. His recent books include

Diplomacy. . He is currently working on a book on Heritage

Tracy Ireland -

Heritage conservation is usually portrayed as inherently ethical. Recent discussions have questioned the uncritical acceptance of this position however, how exactly might we enact an ethical form of forgetting in the context of the cultural politics of heritage, identity and social justice. This chat explores the relationship between ethics, forgetting and (in)significance.

Tracy Ireland is Associate Professor of Cultural Heritage at the University of Canberra. She has worked as an archaeologist and heritage practitioner for a significantly long time, for government, in private practice and most recently as an academic. Her most recent book, co-edited with John Schofield, is , Springer 2015.