

Museum Europe Negotiating Heritage¹

SHARON MACDONALD

ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with some of the implications of the fact that Europe is so widely seen as a place replete with heritage, museums and memory, and also with the continuing expansion in numbers and types of heritage, museums and memory. It seeks to explore some of the ways in which heritage, in particular, is understood (including what it calls 'sticky heritage'), and especially the cultural and social work that it is often seen as able to do. To this end, the article reviews a number of trends in heritage developments, especially the diversification of what it calls 'Museum Europe' (e.g. in the establishment of museums or exhibitions about migration) and the kinds of citizenship that this mobilises. Some of the dilemmas as well as capacities of these developments are discussed. At the same time, the article reviews some of the directions in heritage research and the implications of this, and of 'Museum Europe' itself, for anthropology, ethnology and related disciplines.

KEYWORDS

Europe, heritage, migration, museums, Stendhal syndrome

Preamble

A tour guide produced in the US gives the following advice to tourists visiting Europe:

Don't feel like you have to see something just because it is über-famous. Don't make Europe into a giant checklist. Visit what truly interests you, and feel free to skip what doesn't float your boat. If you are going to wear yourself out, at least do it on the stuff that you truly enjoy.²



It is good advice; and probably a welcome relief from those other kinds of guides that provide endless ‘must-see’ lists and maps covered in stars indicating the significant heritage sites. So too is the following:

soak up the kaleidoscope of Europe’s cultural treasures a little bit at a time. Schedule in rest periods . . . Leave room to breathe, space to picnic, and time to stop and smell the cappuccino. . . . Try not to hit one big museum after another. . . . If all you do is to tick off museums and churches and such, you’re heavily on the ‘tourist’ side of that old tourist/traveler distinction

Getting tourism right – being more of a traveller than a tourist – is not straightforward. It is an accomplishment, requiring effort, planning, negotiation and the paraphernalia of institutionalised advice, including tourist guides, like the Reid Guide that I have just quoted. And getting it wrong is not trivial. It can lead to disappointment and exhaustion, money wasted and fractious friend and family relations. Its consequences can include, in the words of the guide, ‘the whole trip blur[ring] into one large colourful blob of old masters and Gothic cathedrals from which your memory can’t distinguish where Madrid left off and Munich began’. While not exclusive to Europe, the danger is especially relevant here – a continent that Donald Horne referred to as ‘the great museum’ (Horne 1984).

Still worse, however, if you approach Europe as a big must-see museum, is that you risk being completely overwhelmed. Europe – East and West – is just so full of culture, so full of history, so full of heritage, that it will be too much to cope with. You might then find yourself suffering from Stendhal syndrome – a malady to which the Reid Guide, perhaps only half tongue-in-cheek, refers. Stendhal syndrome is an illness in which the sufferer becomes so overwhelmed by the sights with which they are presented that their heart-rate soars, they suffer palpitations and sweats and may even faint. It is named after the French writer Stendhal, who described, in his *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio*, being overcome in such a way when he visited Florence in 1817. The idea of being moved to emotional heights by sublime beauty – natural or cultural – was, of course, part of the Romantic sensibility. But such an experience was only pathologised and medicalised into a ‘syndrome’ in the late twentieth century, when it was written up as such by a Florentine psychiatrist, Graziella Magherini, who witnessed numerous cases of visitors so afflicted by the city’s artworks. In her book, *La Sindrome di Stendhal* (1989), she provides 100 case studies of people whom she had treated. She

sets out her own theory about how the encounter with artworks could trigger anxieties rooted in individuals' personal histories to produce such effects. This is discussed by James Elkins in his *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings*, in which he emphasises not so much the individual biographies of the syndrome's sufferers, as the qualities of the artworks themselves. As he writes of the afflicted: 'their experiences have more to do with the history of the objects than with the history of the patients' (Elkins 2001: 50). There is, he argues, also another important, though inadvertent, finding in Magherini's research, namely, 'that even the most overexcited and unstable tourists, the ones most closely programmed by the tourist industry, are still feeling things that are incited by the works themselves' (ibid.). The tourist experience, that is, is unruly, partly on account of the qualities of the material culture encountered.

This perhaps rather cryptic beginning to this essay is intended to introduce my main concern here, namely with the implications of being in – either as a visitor or more permanently – a place so full of history and heritage, tangible and intangible. That is, it is concerned with being in what I here call Museum Europe, which we might also refer to as Heritage Europe or a Memoryland. It is surely only rarely that the consequences – the 'heritage effects' – of being amidst so much impressive heritage are so dramatic as with Stendhal syndrome. Nevertheless, what has sometimes been called our 'heritage epidemic' or 'memory obsession' (e.g. Bodeman 2002: 24; Huyssen 2003: 3) in Europe creates certain possibilities as well as problems; and it is to some of these that I look in this article. Heritage effects infuse such matters as the effort put into maintaining and restoring some kinds of material and non-material culture and neglecting others; they wend their way into European directives and national policy-making, channelling funds this way rather than another; they work particular spells on publics, shifting how they see certain places or sites. And they interact with our own disciplines – ethnology, anthropology, folklore, cultural and area studies – through such matters as funds available for particular research and through the interests and perspectives of those we study. None of us can avoid Museum Europe and its heritage effects – not least because those of us engaged in ethnological or anthropological study often find ourselves working with others who have very clear ideas about what we should be valuing and attending to.

In what follows, then, I look briefly at some of the heritage challenges of Museum or Heritage Europe. I begin by briefly outlining some perspectives

on the social implications of heritage and, in particular, the implications for countries already full of a considerable amount of existing heritage. In the following parts of the article, I look at aspects of what I call the democratisation of heritage and other attempts to expand or unsettle existing heritage provision. This includes a short consideration of the visiting of heritage, a theme which returns us to Stendhal syndrome, materiality and the unruliness of the tourist encounter. In the final part of the article I offer some short reflections on the implications of heritage and its changing dynamics for ethnological disciplines.

Approaching Heritage

In some academic and also more popular commentary, heritage has been the subject of critique that casts it as a symptom or even cause of various contemporary social ills. This is especially so in critiques which go under the label of ‘the heritage industry’, represented by Robert Hewison’s book of that title (Hewison 1985; see also McGuigan 1996; Littler and Naidoo 2005). In particular, the fact of trying to create, and sometimes recreate, unified heritages, especially patriotic national heritages, is seen as a symptom of the exclusion or marginalisation of others – and as having the effect of solidifying and further extending such exclusion and marginalisation (cf. Boswell and Evans 1999). Such perspectives are generally based on structural theories of identity that propose that the creation of positive senses of collective self-identity has as a (usually necessary) correlate the establishment of more negatively-viewed others (or ‘an Other’), and the creation of arenas in which a homogeneous and united identity is performed (cf. Jenkins 1996). They tend to focus upon contexts in which heritage is created by the relatively powerful, often directly by institutions of the nation-state. Heritage, then, is typically viewed as a tool for instituting certain ideological functions (especially creating a sense of common purpose and affinity to collective ideals); and work conducted tends to focus upon the invented elements of heritage, and on the processes of ‘othering’ or silencing of certain aspects of history that may be involved. As such, heritage tends to be derided, either explicitly or more implicitly, as somehow inauthentic. Such critiques are also often coupled with a vision of heritage as acting like a dead weight – dragging us down and back into the past; getting us bogged down or stuck there; and of stifling contemporary creativity through the strictures of adherence to tradition. That is, they cast an

emphasis on the past as bound up with an avoidance of the present – not so much about remembering the past as avoiding the here and now. This is why Andreas Huyssen (1995, 2003) discusses what he calls a memory obsession as, apparently paradoxically, part of a ‘culture of amnesia’. Heritage is, in his view, a manifestation of a nostalgia that is more about obscuring aspects of the present – and perhaps of certain histories or versions of them – than of a more wholesale or wholesome recalling of the past, even though (indeed perhaps because) it is so driven by concerns of the present. Robert Hewison (1985: 10) argues likewise, that emphasising heritage entails a deflection of attention (and also resources) from the present; ‘the heritage industry’, he writes, ‘draws a screen between ourselves and our true past. . . . Hypnotised by images of the past, we risk losing all capacity for creative change’. Patrick Wright, while less categorical than Hewison, also sees one consequence of living in an ‘old country’ – as the title of his book about Britain’s heritage boom of the 1980s has it – as being a perception of ongoing entropy, in which the present is always inadequate by comparison with the dressed-up national past. As in Hewison’s argument, heritage has a weakening effect on contemporary politics: ‘Abstracted and redeployed, history [i.e. as heritage] seems to be purged of political tension; it has become a unifying spectacle, the settling of all disputes’ (Wright 1999: 134).

In a massive expansion of heritage research over recent years, there has been increased attention not only to heritage production by national and state institutions but also other, often less well-known instances of commemoration and heritage-making by diverse social groups (e.g. Smith 2006; de Jong and Rowlands 2007; Hemme, Tauschek and Bendix 2007; Kockel and Nic Craith 2007; Silverman and Fairchild Ruggles 2007; Anico and Peralta 2009). Some of this has worked within the same theoretical model of heritage as part of the apparatus of ideology formation but, by focusing upon alternative examples, sees it more in these cases as instances of ‘resistance’ to state hegemony (e.g. Samuel 1994). Although not usually discussed in print, this sometimes leads to analytical tensions, where such research still carries a connotation of heritage-making as inauthentic but at the same time wants to celebrate resistance. In particular, there is sometimes discomfort on the part of researchers over identifying processes of invention in cases of heritage-making by minorities, or of the othering or exclusion that can be part of such constructions, too. My comments here are based on participation in various workshops, sometimes of PhD students, working on heritage-related themes

in which such discussions often surfaced. Likewise, there may be uneasiness over how to evaluate so much effort being directed towards the past and whether this should indeed be read exclusively in terms of its contemporary politics.

Other research, however, has been more concerned to focus upon the complexities of heritage-making and reception in particular cases; and to look at heritage as a negotiated process potentially involving numerous players and as expressive of more complex relationships with the past than simply presentist instrumentalism (for examples, see Smith 2006; Hemme, Tauschek and Bendix 2007; Kockel and Nic Craith 2007; Silverman and Fairchild Ruggles 2007). Rather than seeing heritage as necessarily a tool of either hegemony or resistance, such research has been more concerned with questions such as what kinds of identities and forms of historical consciousness are being articulated through specific kinds of heritage representation. Nostalgia, for example, rather than being seen as simply part of an avoidance of facing the present is understood in more nuanced ways as articulating important sentiments about the present, about people's sensibilities and about enduring relationships and values (e.g. Edwards 1998; Boym 2001). And rather than seeing identity-construction as primarily involving making contra-distinctions from others, usually involving binary symbolism and meaningful silence, this research is more likely to see identity as a fragile ongoing outcome, composed through more multiple sources in diverse processes of negotiation. Laura-jane Smith puts this well when she writes: 'heritage is also usefully conceived as a point or *moment* of negotiation' (2007: 165, original emphasis). Rather than accounts solidifying into settled groups of heritage-makers and heritage-receivers, there is more likely to be an attempt to identify a wide range of agencies involved in heritage, including local and global, as well as national (e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006). In such perspectives, identities are more likely to be understood as partial and overlapping, as likely to entail ambivalence, ambiguity and contradiction, and as having fuzzy rather than necessarily sharply drawn boundaries. Theories of narrative and performance have been influential here, for they allow for more complex cultural accounting, involving multiple and sometimes untidy processes of identity-making (ibid.; also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1997). Moreover, questions of authenticity are reframed in such theories, invention being seen as part of the normal creativity of life. The reflexivity of participants is often emphasised as they engage in making and remaking heritage through existing accounts and draw-

ing on resources – including, for example, global heritage organisations – available to them. Another development, which builds further on such perspectives, is drawing on assemblage theory to further map the potentially complex networks and mix of players involved in heritage-making and reception (Macdonald, forthcoming). What this does in addition, is to take into consideration non-human players (e.g. in the heritage case, the buildings or sites) and detailed techniques of policy implementation (e.g. legislation or the production of statistics) that may also have consequences for outcomes or heritage effects.

Sticky Heritage

It should be noted, however, that while the attention to complexity and reflexivity in recent heritage accounts is welcome, the questions raised by earlier heritage research about the social consequences – or aspirations – of heritage developments are not irrelevant. Those involved in heritage-making, for example, may have strong views about the social effects that they intend particular heritage to have or they may themselves employ certain notions of authenticity, perhaps as a means of demarcating some kinds of heritage as less legitimate. The idea that heritage can be a means of helping to provide a sense of identity and belonging is prevalent among policy-makers and, as Anthony Shelton (2006: 76) has pointed out, institutions such as museums have been increasingly called upon by government to play a part in ‘the delivery of external institutional objectives broadly related to social-engineering policies and subordinated to so-called market forces’. These have included matters as diverse as helping to make more older people computer-literate, young people less prone to criminal activity and asylum-seekers less alienated. Ongoing at the time of writing is an initiative from the UK government, organised by the Museums and Libraries Association on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, to investigate the possibility of a Museum of British History – or of ‘Britishness’ as those who attended a meeting in June 2008, to which I was also invited, often slipped into saying. In doing so, they were recognising the fact that the initiative was part of Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s wider preoccupation with ways of fostering senses of British values. In January 2006, for example, he proposed that Remembrance Sunday should become ‘British Day’, ‘a national day of patriotism to celebrate British history, achievements and culture’ (*Guardian*, 14 January 2006). What is clear

from this is that a fairly instrumental use of heritage and invention of tradition is still alive and well.

In such a conception, heritage and tradition are envisaged as social glue that might be used to stick together disparate bits of society and to attach those sectors that seem to have become detached or that were never bonded in the first place. The same operates at European level too, the attempt to create some kind of Museum of Europe being at least partly a product of such thinking. Begun in the late 1990s, the initiative to argue for such a museum project was based on the idea that this would be able to ‘take Europeans back to the roots of their shared civilisation’ (www.expo-europe.be/en/site/musee/musee-europe-bruxelles.html; see also www.eurobru.com/musee-eu.htm). In October 2007, an initial exhibition opened in Brussels, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, and thus half a century of European unification; a network of museums across Europe which share the ambition to highlight shared European culture has been established; and there are plans for a Museum of Europe to be based in Brussels.

It is important to note, however, that while the ideas here are partly based on the model by which nation-states were imagined in the nineteenth century, they do not simply replicate them. Rather than excluding difference or using it as an ‘alter’ *against* which to define the citizen, what we see instead (though with varying intensity and results) are attempts to recognise diverse and varied identities within the nation or Europe. This was seen as important for any Museum of British History, as for any Museum of Europe. Difference in such cases is not just assimilated to a common identity, neither simply tolerated but is actively included. What is involved here, then, is a diversification of citizenship. However, and before we sever all links with earlier perspectives, we should investigate how much diversity and whether it is only certain kinds of difference that can be incorporated. This remains to be seen for these two examples. Other cases, however, provide an indication of the situation at present.

Museum Europe Diversified

Let me turn here then to some aspects of the diversification of heritage in Europe, that is, to the production of a pluralised Museum Europe. One dimension of this, over the last ten years in particular, has been increased attention to immigration. In part, this is a consequence of the recognition that

immigration has considerably altered the social composition of European societies. Setting up museums and exhibitions on this topic offers a way in which to incorporate this theme – one that has usually been more or less excluded from national history museums. In addition, the setting up of museums and exhibitions of immigration in Europe has been inspired by some high-profile and popular examples in other parts of the world, especially the Migration Museum of South Australia in Adelaide, which opened in 1986, and Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York, which opened in 1990. These seemed to offer the opportunity to mark, celebrate and present the histories of the multiple different groups of immigrants to these countries.

The most high-profile European example of a museum dedicated to the theme of migration is the national museum of immigration in Paris, the *Cité de l'Immigration*, which opened in October 2007. Located in a former building of colonial administration that has subsequently served as a museum of the colonies and then of African and Oceanic art, it cost over 20 million Euros. Following a report in 2001, Jacques Chirac voiced support for the project in his presidential election campaign in 2002; and planning for what was initially called the Centre for Resources and Memory of Immigration began in 2003 (Toubon 2007; see also a special issue of *Museum International*, Vol. 59, nos 1–2, 2007). These were years of mounting tension over immigration and disaffection among immigrants, which erupted in riots in Paris during the summer of 2005. Central to the museum project's explicit aim was to give official and public recognition to 'the contribution of immigration to the building of France', as Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin stated at the official launch of the project in 2004. For without a 'change in the perceptions of this phenomenon', he declared, 'our cohesion as a nation is at stake' (www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article-imprim.php3?id_article=4432). As Jacques Toubon, chairman of the project, also explained, the Museum was intended as 'part of an initiative regarding the truth about French identity. . . . [showing] that France's civilisation is the product of a cross-fertilisation of many cultures, peoples and religions' (ibid.). On the one hand, this could be seen as a continuation of a strong centrist theme in French social and cultural politics – the idea of French citizens as equally French. On the other, however, it marked something of a departure in its official recognition of French identity entailing difference and diversity.

How successful the Museum is in its aims, however, remains questionable. Its opening was fairly low-key and visitor numbers seem to have been modest.

Michael Kimmelman, writing in the *New York Times* of 17 October 2007, describes the Museum as ‘a well-meaning dud’: ‘Its obvious reluctance to dwell on touchy subjects like the occupation of Algeria is predictable, this being a government enterprise’. The museum’s message, he continues, is ‘people emigrate from many places, for many reasons, with difficulty, often reluctantly, and they bring their cultures with them. As if you didn’t know.’

Calculated or anodyne though these representations may often be, the emphasis on immigration is significant. Indeed, we could say that the figure of the immigrant has become a contemporary European archetype; and increasingly it is as such that the citizen is addressed. Not only in high profile and government-led museums, but in numerous smaller exhibitions, and especially in city museums and in museums of ethnography and ethnology, we find exhibitions dedicated to immigration. Suitcases and spartan rooms are the visual currency; and typically the accounts are structured around individual narratives – stories in which food, weather and work are staple ingredients. The individualisation of these accounts – that nevertheless blur into a kind of sameness (often, later, I can’t remember whether this or that happened in the story by a Greek immigrant or a Somali one, for example) – is not just a stylistic device but part of the wider pluralisation of heritage and of citizenship themselves. In the classic, traditional museum you would be hard pressed to find any individuals apart from great public figures, especially national heroes. By contrast, many museums these days are full of images of individuals and mini-profiles about, or statements by, them. We are presented with the city, or nation, not through some overall account but through individual portraits. It is a recovery of individual variety; it is a strategy that manages to avoid reducing the place to a single persona, to the long-time resident perhaps; and it is a good way to signal the multiplicity of cultural heritage. But in some cases I find myself wondering about, and even being bored by, the thin-ness of the presentations. ‘I am Gurinda Singh. I like Bollywood movies and *Top Gear*; chapatis and baked beans; and I support Manchester United’. This is a fictive and perhaps unconvincing example but similar ones, upon which it is closely modelled, are not hard to find.

Paradoxically, the individuals displayed seem to me to be reduced to a new motif: that of the happily hybrid citizen. The real content of their difference, and perhaps the dilemmas that they face because of it, is submerged under the sea of smiling faces. Sometimes too, and this is where I feel more uncomfortable, the presentation of immigration ends up inadvertently supporting

a division between immigrants and the long-settled, the latter sometimes as an implicit 'norm'. Sticking immigration in a separate museum, never mind in a building with a heritage of disciplining and exhibiting the colonial other, surely suggests this, even if the exhibition text tries to highlight that the majority of us has a migration ancestry.

Parts of the generally excellent *Projekt Migration* – a project resulting in several exhibitions in Germany in 2005 – also made me uncomfortable in this way; though other sections were reflexive about the institutional structures that variously preferred or outlawed certain kinds of identities (www.koelnischerkunstverein.de/migration/). Late one evening, in part of the exhibition in Cologne, I noticed four young black men, visiting separately, spending a good deal of time with an exhibit that explained about citizenship tests and provided self-assessment samples. Maybe I was mistaken, but my guess was that they were not there just because of the merits of the exhibition but to learn how to get through these tests. The fact that the exhibition had inadvertently met such a need, and was being used in this way, somehow spoke more to me than many of the exhibits themselves. On the one hand, the fact that the exhibition was reaching this population and that it was filling a serious gap in social provision was laudable. On the other, however, there was some pathos in the fact that something that had not been expressly designed for this reason, but more to illustrate to help others to imagine the difficulties involved in becoming a citizen, was being turned to this purpose. Here was a strangely contorted turning of representation into reality; citizenship instruction a side-effect of public exhibition-making. But perhaps this 'side-effect' was not much different from many other exhibitions: 'making up citizens', as Tony Bennett has put it, has so often been a dimension of cultural policy (Bennett 2007), and heritage is one, potentially compelling, form of this.

It is worth noting here that migration museums in Europe face an inherently more thorny task than do those in the new world. This is because they are based in societies in which the politics of immigration are significant. In the new world, the long-settled, the non-immigrants, are embattled minorities who have suffered centuries of discrimination and marginalisation. In Europe, however, the situation could be said to be largely reversed: on the whole it is those who would claim to be the indigenes (of the continent or particular nations) who occupy the political centre, and it is the immigrants who are more marginal. Certainly, this is not absolute and much contemporary neo-nationalism is connected with a sense of growing disaffection from those

who see themselves as a country's most 'legitimate' or most 'real' inhabitants – on account of their heritage – but who fear that they are becoming minorities or that their interests are becoming subsidiary in the face of multicultural policies. Nevertheless, it accounts for the insipidity and awkwardness of some attempts to represent immigration in public culture, and for the tendency, as noted above, to leave the non-immigrant unspecified but nevertheless present as a kind of outline for the audience to fill in. That filling-in process is part of the problem: in the absence of prompts to do otherwise, audiences will fill it in according to assumptions that they already hold.

Difficult Heritage

Immigration is undoubtedly a difficult topic to deal with – and while I have reservations about some of the ways with which it has been tackled, I also recognise the integrity, merit and significance of most of them. More widely, we might also see this attention to immigration as part of a trend towards broaching awkward and unsettling topics in museums. No longer so frequently concerned only with the positive or glorious, we have seen a massive turn in the second half of the twentieth century and escalating towards its end and into this one, towards what is sometimes called 'dark' (cf. Lennon and Foley 2000), 'dissonant' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996), 'difficult' (Macdonald 2009) or 'negative' (Meskell 2002) heritage – and in particular, to histories that disrupt heroic historical national images. Some of this slides into memorialisation – into the commemoration of victims (Williams 2007). Some of it is part of a politicisation and even of calls for repatriation. Attention to slavery is one example (see Dann and Seaton 2001). Much of it is put to work to mark change, to say that we are aware of the wrongs of the past and we will not let them happen again. In some cases this becomes a kind of talismanic act: if we publicly mark and commemorate atrocity we can protect our futures.

Over some years now I have been researching this phenomenon, especially with reference to Germany, where there has been an extensive heritagisation and museumification of the Second World War and Holocaust over the past two decades in particular. The centre of my anthropological focus has been the city of Nuremberg, which in 2001 – after years of debate and wrangling – finally opened a permanent exhibition about its Nazi past.

It is sometimes argued that making something heritage or putting it into a museum paradoxically makes it less rather than more visible, because it

provides an excuse to forget all about it. Robert Musil famously commented: 'There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument' (quoted in Neumann 2000: 4). Perhaps, this is what some policy-makers hope and sometimes it is the effect. I am not convinced by this as a general argument, however, not least of all because once labelled as heritage any subject is signalled as worthy of attention, and its public visibility and presence in the landscape are surely increased. While blue or brown plaques may be frequently ignored, or museums may be little visited, they are nevertheless there, and more capable of attracting attention than would no marking at all. As Bernhard Tschöfen remarks, one 'banal . . . but not self-evident' consequence of heritage listing is that 'everything listed can also be visited' (2007: 26; my translation). We might indeed put this more strongly still: that everything listed is somehow meant to be visited; this becomes part of its *raison d'être*. Certainly, the experience in Nuremberg of making touristic provision of guided tours, information boards and an exhibition have led to increased numbers of visitors to the city's Nazi heritage. There has also been – though not to the same extent as in many other places – the kind of spiralling of touristic provision once the function of existing to be visited has become part of a site's identity. Attention directed towards the past can, nevertheless, divert attention from the present; and, moreover, the selections that are made in the creation of public memory can easily become a kind of exculpation or redemption story. There is something of the latter in the Nuremberg case and, indeed, in many other representations of difficult heritage, such as slavery (Macdonald 2009). A terrible past is juxtaposed with what by comparison seems – and is made – a guiltless present; history becomes an opportunity for transcendence and moving on.

But is it just for this opportunity – a chance to feel better about the present – that people visit such uncomfortable histories? Given that Museum Europe is so full of wonderful, uplifting heritage, which surely is more capable of creating good feelings, why do people spend time at battlefields, concentration camps, war-graves or interrogation centres? What are the hundreds of thousands of people doing when they visit what have, appropriately I think, come to be called sites of conscience? These are questions that take us back to this essay's preamble and consideration of the consumption of heritage and of the effects of different kinds of places and heritage.

There are, of course, many different kinds of motives for such visiting and that of the war veteran who visits a former battlefield cannot be simply

elided with that of the child on the school trip to Dachau. My own first-hand research has been with visitors to the site of the Nuremberg Rallies – the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds (*ibid.*). This was a propaganda stage for displaying perpetrator power, so it may not work in the same ways as, say, a site of atrocity – not least because there are some, a small minority, who go to a site of Nazi grandeur as a pilgrimage, out of admiration for Nazism. Others are there because it is just another thing that you do if you are ‘doing Nuremberg’. However, among the many reasons offered by visitors themselves, what struck me most about how so many visitors talked about the site was how they used it for wider moral reflection. This was in part about the historical period of Nazism itself and the past more generally, but it was also about the present, both in terms of other global atrocities and about how we should, and should not, relate to the past. Some of the visitors whom I interviewed were, certainly, comforted by seeing the present so favourably in contrast to the Nazi past and by the sense of having left that past behind. Many more, though, were concerned to try to understand what had led to such crimes, to look for signs of the same kinds of possibilities in the present, and to find ways to make themselves vigilant – to ensure, as so many said, that the same could never happen again. Visiting a heritage site about such a terrible history was part of this work of being vigilant – it was a kind of morally sensitising process. It put people on self-watch. In addition, a visit was, in itself, a performance of commitment to such a sensitising and watchful process, and to taking a moral stance not just on crimes of the past but on anything that might contribute to such crimes in the future.

The materiality of sites matters in this process. People could just read about the history or watch a documentary about it – most do these too – but being in a place is also something more. Not only does it entail a greater commitment of time and energy, and offer the possibility for a concentrated experience, it also brings the visitor into contact with things and places that they believe will have a greater impact upon them. Many visitors anticipate that real sites of certain events will make them directly experience something from the time, and many are open to this, waiting for a mild version of a Stendhal effect. I recall one visitor to the Nazi site who was sitting with his notebook open, waiting to see what poetry the place would push him to produce. Others were clearly trying to work out how it made them feel, with a mix of receptiveness and caution. That places work some kinds of effects is not to say that this experience is unmediated – it is thoroughly part of all

kinds of prior cultural expectations and through the very fact that this is for most people part of what being in a visiting frame is about. But it is not for all. As Elkins writes in his discussion of Stendhal syndrome, for every visitor who is afflicted with this, there are those with the opposite condition – anti-Stendhal syndrome or Mark Twain malaise – who are determined to feel nothing at all (2001: 51). This too is historically as well as biographically located.

Conclusion

In her *Tourists of History*, Marita Sturken (2007: 6) describes the relentless commercialisation and kitschification of atrocity in the US: 9/11 teddy bears and Oklahoma City bombing snow-globes. She sees this as part of what she calls a ‘culture of comfort’ by which the US constructs itself as innocent. This ‘culture of comfort’, she writes:

functions as a form of depoliticization and as a means to confront loss, grief and fear through processes that disavow politics. This feeling of comfort is intricately related to U.S. patriotic culture. The experience of patriotism and nationalism is reassuring and comforting; it feels good to feel patriotic because it provides a sense of belonging.

This is also bound up with consumerism, which in many ways fosters the same kinds of senses of comfort. It is a compelling and nuanced analysis.

In Europe, however, I am not sure that things work in quite the same way – at least, in many cases. Not only are patriotism, nationalism and consumerism all, and increasingly, hedged about with a good deal more ambivalence than seems to be so in her account of the US, heritage in Europe is increasingly being used to *unsettle* – to dislodge us from our comfort zones. That is, it is put to work – and employed by visitors themselves – to provide a dutiful cold shower in what are otherwise at risk of being overly consumerist and unreflective lives. Not all of it has this effect and this is not the sum total of what is happening, but it is, I think, a significant part of it and increasingly so.

What we are seeing overall in Museum Europe today, then, is a proliferation and diversification of heritage. Not all heritages work their effects in the same ways and not all summon up the same kind of Europe. More research is needed to try better to tease out not simply ‘heritage effects’ in general but also the differences between them and the ways in which certain experiences might be transposed from one heritage arena to another. We might think of

the latter in part as a kind of *intermateriality*, analogous with intertextuality. What particular cues are given by certain heritage forms would be a central part of such research.

The title of the conference at which an earlier and shorter version of this article was first presented – and for which it was written – was *Transcending 'European Heritages'*. On the basis of my own perspective on heritage and some of the ideas expressed in this article, and perhaps taking the title more literally than the organisers intended, I argue that we should not so much be trying to 'transcend' heritage as grappling with it and exploring its consequences, limitations and also affordances – in all its diversity. To do so, we can draw on our own disciplinary heritages and the particular mix of insights and skills that these bring. Key features of our ethno-anthropo-folkloro-culturo-logies, in my view, are empirical engagement with the production and consumption of heritage 'on the ground'; unequalled consideration of the local and the specific; sensitivity to the self-reflexivity of the players involved as well as to their actions and performances; and unflinching attention to how our own theorisations may play into what we are attempting to study.

To expand upon – rather than transcend – our current work, however, also requires, I contend, doing more synthetic work to try to piece together the findings from individual studies in order to come to grips with commonalities and differences. We need this in order to understand what it is that makes the difference between one kind of heritage and how it is consumed and another. We risk, in my view, not bringing together the results of the many individual studies, often carried out for PhD or post-doctoral research; and not systematically furthering debate through more attempts to compare and contrast the kinds of results that these are giving us.

Expanding out from our existing disciplinary heritages also means not being nervous of attending to topics outside our disciplines' traditional gaze. At the *Transcending 'European Heritages'* conference there was much encouraging evidence of this. One example was a panel about exhibiting Europe's science and technology, which I helped to co-organise.³ Deciding to tackle 'European heritage' via a topic which might not naturally seem to be 'heritage', but which nevertheless plays an important role in Europe as an imaginary, was intended as a means of expanding the range of what we look at, providing a fresh angle on existing debates, and, in the process, complicating received wisdoms. We saw this as important to do, too, because ethnology and related studies have been part of the way in which certain visions of Europe have

been formed and sustained. In particular, they have tended to sustain certain views about what 'heritage' is and sometimes inadvertently played into the business of cultural authentication. Shifting our gaze, then, is a useful disciplinary unsettlement – the equivalent of the heritage cold shower, which I have written about above. Not only does altering the specifics of our ethno-anthropo-folkloro-culturo-logical gaze potentially shift how we understand Europe and how Europe 'makes itself up' (to borrow from Bennett, above), it also reshapes our disciplines, and the cultural work that they do in making up Europe and making up heritage.

◆

Sharon Macdonald is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, having previously been Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Sheffield. With a regional focus on Europe, especially the United Kingdom and Germany, her research interests include the anthropology of Europe, identities, historical consciousness, museums, cultural heritage and science.

◆

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a plenary lecture at the 9th SIEF Congress, delivered at the University of Ulster on 16 June 2008. The lecture was sponsored by the Folklore Society. I thank the organisers for inviting me, and also my fellow participants for further ideas in developing the paper. I also thank Ullrich Kockel and the anonymous referees for helpful suggestions. The research on Nuremberg was funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, to both of which I am very grateful.
2. This and the following quotations are from the Reid Guide 'The Stendhal Syndrome: Save Yourself from Overkill', www.reidsguides.com/t_ss/t_ss_stendhal.html (accessed 26 September 2008).
3. The main organiser was Barbara Wenk and the other co-organiser was Morgan Meyer. I thank the co-organisers and participants in the panel for an enjoyable and stimulating discussion.

References

- Anico, M. and E. Peralta (2009) (eds), *Heritage and Identity: Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World* (London: Routledge).
- Bennett, T. (2007), 'The Work of Culture', *Cultural Sociology* 1 (1): 33–47.

- Bodeman, M. (2002), *In den Wogen der Erinnerung* (Munich: DTV).
- Boswell, D. and J. Evans (1999) (eds), *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums* (London: Routledge).
- Boym, S. (2001), *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books).
- Connerton, P. (1989), *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Dann, G. and A. Seaton (2001) (eds), *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism* (New York: Haworth Hospitality Press).
- De Jong, F. and M. Rowlands (2007) (eds), *Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press).
- Edwards, J. (1998), 'The Need for a "Bit of History": Place and Past in English Identity', in N. Lovell (ed.), *Locality and Belonging* (London: Routledge), 147–167.
- Elkins, J. (2001), *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (London: Routledge).
- Hemme, D., M. Tauschek and R. Bendix (2007) (eds), *Prädikat "Heritage": Wertschöpfungen aus kulturellen Ressourcen* (Berlin: Lit).
- Hewison, R. (1985), *The Heritage Industry* (London: Methuen).
- Horne, D. (1984), *The Great Museum: The Re-presentation of History* (London: Pluto).
- Huysen, A. (1995), *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge).
- (2003), *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
- Jenkins, R. (1996), *Social Identity* (London: Routledge).
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1997), *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: California University Press).
- (2006), 'World Heritage and Cultural Economics', in I. Karp, C. Kratz, L. Szwaja and T. Ybarro-Frausto (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham/NC: Duke University Press), 161–202.
- Kockel, U. and M. Nic Craith (2007) (eds), *Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Lennon, J. and M. Foley (2000), *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Thomson).
- Littler, J. and R. Naidoo (2005) (eds), *The Politics of Heritage* (London: Routledge).
- Macdonald, S. (2002), 'On "Old Things": The Fetishization of Past Everyday Life', in N. Rapport (ed.), *British Subjects* (Oxford: Berg).
- (2009), *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London: Routledge).
- (forthcoming), 'Reassembling Nuremberg', *Culture and Economy*.
- McGuigan, J. (1996), *Culture and the Public Sphere* (London: Taylor and Francis).
- Meskell, L. (2002), 'Negative Heritage and Past Mastering in Archaeology', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 51 (3), 557–574.

- Neumann, K. (2000), *Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Minnesota Press).
- Samuel, R. (1994), *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso).
- Shelton, A. (2006), 'Museums and anthropologies: practices and narratives', in S. Macdonald (ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell), 64-80.
- Silverman, H. and D. Fairchild Ruggles (2007) (eds), *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights* (New York: Springer).
- Smith, L. (2006), *The Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge).
- (2007), 'Empty Gestures? Heritage and the Politics of Recognition', in H. Silverman and D. Fairchild Ruggles (eds), *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights* (New York: Springer), 159-171.
- Sturken, M. (2007), *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press).
- Toubon, J. (2007), 'The Political Genesis of the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*', *Museum International* 59 (1-2), 8-12.
- Tunbridge, J. and G. Ashworth (1996), *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: John Wiley).
- Tschofen, B. (2007), 'Antreten, ablehnen, verwalten? Was der Heritage-Boom der Kulturwissenschaften aufträgt', in D. Hemme, M. Tauschek and R. Bendix (eds), *Prädikat "Heritage": Wertschöpfungen aus kulturellen Ressourcen* (Berlin: LIT), 19-32.
- Williams, P. (2007), *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocity* (Oxford: Berg).
- Wright, P. (1985), *On Living in an Old Country* (London: Verso).
- (1999), 'Trafficking in History', in D. Boswell and J. Evans (eds), *Representing the Nation* (London: Routledge), 115-150.
- <www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article-imprim.php3?id_article=4432> (accessed 27 September 2008).
- <www.eurobru.com/musee-eu.htm> (accessed 27 September 2008).
- <www.expo-europe.be/en/site/musee/musee-europe-bruxelles.html> (accessed 27 September 2008).
- <www.koelnischerkunstverein.de/migration/> (accessed 27 September 2008).