

Forgetting to remember, remembering to forget: Late modern heritage practices, sustainability and the ‘crisis’ of accumulation of the past

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Abstract

This paper considers the implications for cultural heritage of observations regarding individual and collective memory which suggest that the process of *forgetting* is in fact integral to *remembering*—that one cannot properly form new memories and attach value to them without also selecting some things to forget. Remembering is an active process of cultivating and pruning, and not one of complete archiving and total recall, which would overwhelm and cause us to be unable to make confident decisions about which memories are valuable and which are not. I argue that the same is true of heritage; that as a result of its increasingly broad definition, and the exponential growth of listed objects, places and practices of heritage in the contemporary world, we hazard becoming overwhelmed by memory and in the process rendering heritage ineffective and worthless. I refer to the consequence of this heterogeneous piling up of disparate and conflicting pasts in the present as a ‘crisis’ of accumulation of the past. To deal with this crisis adequately, we must pay increased attention to the *management* of heritage. This should not only refer to processes of preservation and conservation, but also to active decisions to de-list or cease to conserve particular forms of heritage once their significance to contemporary and future societies can no longer be demonstrated. De-accessioning and disposal must become a key area of attention for critical heritage studies in the coming decades if heritage is to remain sustainable and uphold its claims to relevance in contemporary global societies.

Keywords: Preservation; de-accessioning; memory; sustainability; forgetting; late modernity

Introduction

In this speculative paper, I aim to raise some points for debate regarding the implications of current global heritage making practices and their sustainability. I argue that the late modern period has been one which has witnessed not only an exponential expansion in the categories and numbers of objects, places and practices which have come to be defined, listed¹, conserved and exhibited as heritage, but fundamental shifts in the values which heritage is held to represent. In addition to the preservation of tangible forms of heritage, we have also seen a global shift in the increased attention paid to intangible forms of heritage in reaction to UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003a). Old notions of a single 'canon' of heritage have been replaced by more 'representative' models, which recognise a multitude of different 'heritages' as a consequence of the acknowledgement of the postcolonial politics of representation and difference. Indeed, practices of heritage-making and processes of listing, conservation and heritage management have become synonymous with notions of 'care' (see Harrison 2012a). However, we have rarely turned to reconsider past conservation decisions, but have simply continued to add to existing heritage 'lists' and registers, allowing them to swell and replicate. With all of these factors contributing to the exponential growth of heritage in the late modern world, we have very rarely considered processes by which heritage objects, places and practices might be removed from these lists, de-accessioned from museums and galleries or allowed to fall into ruin without active intervention. One of the implications of taking a critical approach to heritage is that it can no longer be considered to be a universal category of value (e.g. Byrne [1991] 2008, Cleere 2001, Smith 2006), hence objects, places and practices are conserved according to criteria that are culturally determined. It follows that certain objects, places and practices which have previously been identified, preserved and managed as 'heritage' will at some point cease to be relevant to contemporary and/or future societies, or come to represent values which are no longer considered pertinent or sustainable.

The implications of this piling up of heterogeneous, often contradictory traces of the past in the present, alongside the increasing official listing and preservation of intangible heritage practices and traditions, have not been widely considered by heritage practitioners or scholars. In considering the implications of the rapid expansion and proliferation of heritage over the past few decades, I draw on observations from memory studies regarding individual and collective memory. These suggest that the process of *forgetting* is in fact integral to *remembering*—that one cannot properly form new memories and attach value to them without also selecting some things to forget. I contend that the same is true of heritage, and that as a result of the increasingly broad definition of heritage, and the exponential growth of listed objects, places and practices of heritage in the contemporary world, we risk being overwhelmed by memory, and in the process making all heritage ineffective and worthless. I refer to the consequence of this process of the heterogeneous piling up of disparate and conflicting pasts in the present as a 'crisis' of accumulation of the past. To deal with this crisis adequately, we must pay increased attention to the management of heritage, which should not only refer to processes of preservation and conservation, but also to active decisions to de-list or cease to conserve particular forms of heritage once their significance to contemporary and future societies can no longer be demonstrated. In doing so, I make reference to the concept of sustainability and its implications for cultural heritage. This forces us to question not only the capacities of various material heritages to persist, but also whether the pasts which we are actively creating in the present, through the various forms of heritage we preserve, could or should endure into the future.

A present drowning in its pasts? Late modernity's memory crisis

The emergence of memory as a crucial concern in Western societies is one of the key cultural and political phenomena of late twentieth century modernity (Huysen 2000: 57, see also 1995, 2003). The literature which considers this process developed out of an older set of concerns regarding the relationship between memory and modernity, which were established in the work of Benjamin, Nietzsche and Halbwachs, amongst others (see further discussion in Misztal 2003). Richard Terdiman (1993) goes so far as to make note of modernity's 'memory crisis', while Kammen (1995) situates the roots of the post-war heritage movement in the development of a modern sense of nostalgia and an obsession with preservation, the forcible act of not forgetting. Much of the work on memory in the late twentieth century has focussed on the role of popular culture in shaping collective memory and representations of the past. Indeed, several historians have argued that in the post-war period, popular culture has become the principal site for the creation and contestation of memory and identity politics (for example Lipsitz 1990). The globalisation of the public anxiety around memory in a media saturated world, and its flip side, a feverish obsession with not forgetting, needs to be viewed as one of the most important cultural developments of the past few decades (Huysen 2003).

The late twentieth and early twenty-first century has witnessed an exponential global growth in the number of objects and places which are actively identified, listed, conserved and exhibited as heritage, alongside a rapid expansion in its definition to incorporate a large range of new forms of material mnemonics; from cultural landscapes to intimate, everyday objects. These moves have been driven by various factors, perhaps the most important of which is a heightened sense of risk and vulnerability of aspects of cultural heritage in response to late (or 'liquid' c.f. Baumann 2000) modernity's self-defining speed of technological, social, cultural and environmental change (see for example Virilio 1986, Harvey 1990, Jameson 1991, Augé 1995, Tomlinson 2007). This has led to a persistent and pervasive 'heritagisation' (c.f. Walsh 1992) of society in which the traces and memories of many different pasts pile up, constantly surfacing and intervening in our present. I argue that the goal of a critical field of interdisciplinary heritage studies is not to assume that such processes are 'natural' or inherently morally 'correct', but to interrogate the 'work' of heritage (c.f. Appadurai 1996, see Byrne 2008), which refers to its social, economic and political functions. To put it in Foucauldian terms, this requires an exploration of the nexus of interlinked knowledge-power effects, forms of authority, techniques and strategies by which individuals and groups are rendered governable which heritage makes possible at various scales, from the individual and the local to the national and global (see also Smith 2006). Importantly, official² forms of heritage must be viewed as intricate and shifting assemblages (or *agencements*) composed of a range of people, ideas, institutions and apparatuses (*dispositifs*), all of which facilitate complex processes of social governance and a recursive making and remaking of our material and cultural worlds (Harrison 2012a; see also Bennett 2009, Macdonald 2009b). One of the most important of these apparatuses/*dispositifs*, defined by Agamben (following Foucault) as 'anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings' (2009: 14) (and indeed, the system of relations between them), is the heritage register or list.

Elsewhere, drawing on the work of a number of other scholars (e.g. Lowenthal 1985, 1998, Hewison 1987, Walsh 1992, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, Dicks 2003, Di Giovine 2008), I have outlined the dimensions of the late modern 'heritage boom', and the exponential growth of various official heritage registers, catalogues and lists at all levels—international, national, regional and local (see Harrison 2012 a and b). Over the past few decades, these lists

themselves have replicated at the same time as the numbers of objects, places and practices on each of them ballooned. The globalisation of what we might term ‘the UNESCO approach’ to heritage, as a result of the spread of the principles of the World Heritage Convention has played a major role in this, in its insistence that State Parties draw up their own national lists, in addition to tentative lists, prior to nominations being submitted for consideration by the World Heritage Committee. Such processes of categorizing and listing might be understood not only as one of the underlying modes of ordering of modernity (Law 1993), but also as a direct response to the perception of ‘risk’ and the vulnerability of heritage and the past. This latter concept, which I argue (following Giddens 1990, 1999, Beck 1992 and Bauman 2000) is an integral part of the modern sensibility, has accelerated and driven a series of important developments in relation to heritage (alongside other cultural phenomena) in the globalised late modern world (see Harrison 2012a).

Many of these heritage lists and registers have a long history, during which different, and sometimes conflicting criteria and value systems have governed their operation (see Mason 2002, Clarke 2010 for discussion of values in heritage). Yet, very rarely have those lists been revised at the point at which new criteria have been introduced. There seems to be a general perception that once objects, places and/or practices are gazetted, and hence transformed into a privileged class of ‘thing’ which we call ‘heritage’, that they will very rarely revert or transform into something else. The heritage list or register comes to act as a sort of holding pen; a limbo where redundant objects, places and practices are given a ‘second life’ by way of various regimes of management, which remove them from the realm of the everyday and exhibit them as fragments and relics of a threatened past or present (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 2006, Hetherington 2004). The World Heritage List itself provides a good example of this. Despite the various changes in the scope and definition of heritage employed in the operation of the World Heritage Committee and its State Parties and advisory bodies, the list has continued to grow annually. Only two sites have ever been de-registered from the list, and these not as a result of reconsideration of the criteria for their inscription, but only because of changes which undermined those values for which they were listed. The first of these sites to be delisted was the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman, listed in 1994 after the successful breeding and re-introduction of wild Arabian Oryx, extinct in the wild since the 1970s, into this Central Omani reserve. The site was delisted in 2007 in consultation with the State Party following their reduction of the area of the reserve by 90% and the decline in wild Oryx because of loss of habitat and poaching (UNESCO 2007). The second, the cultural landscape of the Dresden Elbe Valley in Germany, was also listed as a World Heritage Site in 2004. In 2006, the World Heritage Committee placed the site on its list of World Heritage in Danger, and threatened to remove it from the World Heritage List: as ‘plans to build a bridge across the Elbe would have such a serious impact on the integrity of property's landscape that it may no longer deserve to be on the World Heritage List’ (UNESCO 2006). After protracted discussions between the municipal authorities and representatives of the World Heritage Committee, plans for the construction of the controversial four-lane Waldschlösschen Bridge subsequently went ahead, and the site was removed from the list at a meeting of the World Heritage Committee in 2009. Nonetheless, the Committee remained open to components of the landscape being re-nominated, as it ‘recognized that parts of the site might be considered to be of outstanding universal value, but that it would have to be presented under different criteria and boundaries’ (UNESCO 2009).

Despite these rare cases, which are very much exceptions to the rule, the idea of delisting any of the (at the time of writing) almost 1000 sites on the World Heritage List, due to a reconsideration of the values for which they were listed in the first place, seems extremely

unlikely. This is also the case for almost all other national and regional heritage registers of which I am aware. For example, approximately 1,500 resources have been removed from the National Register of Historic Places in the US (approximately 0.001% of the more than 1.4 million individual resources presently listed according to a search of the National Register database at the time of writing), almost all as a result of loss of historic integrity by demolition, fire or other forms of damage. Similarly, in England, properties may be removed from the statutory list managed by English Heritage, but only in circumstances where ‘new evidence is available about the lack of special architectural or historic interest of the building, or a material change of circumstances, for example fire damage’ (English Heritage 2010). Unlike these examples, many regional or municipal heritage registers do not even make arrangements for delisting. The assumption seems to be that the values on which criteria are established for designation are universal and will never change. Indeed, it seems relevant here that the question of ‘how many?’ World Heritage Sites was an appropriate number has very rarely been discussed, instead, the focus has been on increasing the representativeness (and hence the size) of the list, rather than reviewing the basis for past decision making processes (see for example Bandarin 2007).

Heritage and the late modern disassociation of preservation and value: An object lesson

I have so far argued that a number of factors—including the increasingly broad definition of heritage, the growth of heritage tourism in the global economy (see for example, Dicks 2003, Di Giovine 2008, Long and Labadi 2010, p. 5) and the linked obsession with risk and memorialisation in late modern societies—have led to a proliferation of objects, places and practices which are preserved, managed and exhibited as heritage in the contemporary world. When considered collectively, it is possible to argue that this proliferation of heritage has led to a current ‘crisis’ of accumulation of heterogeneous and conflicting pasts in the present. Before I discuss some of the issues this crisis raises, and some ways in which we might think about beginning to address it, I want to introduce a material metaphor—an object lesson, if you will—which helps to illustrate tangibly the form that this crisis is taking. I draw my example from Budapest’s Szobor Park, the ‘theme park’ for removed and defaced Communist era memorials and statuary (Figures 1). The park, opened in 1993, contains the remains of 42 Communist statues and memorials that were erected in Hungarian public spaces between 1947 and 1988, which were defaced or removed following the 1989 Revolution and the fall of Communism. Designed by architect Akos Eleod, it contains an open air Statue Park and a series of mock ‘Brutalist’ brick walls and architectural follies, which are intended to frame a space for reflecting on revolution and the fall of Communism. Indeed, while the park is intended to educate the visitor about the ‘fall of Communism, and not Communism itself’ (Rethly 2008), it oscillates between irony and infamy in its presentation of historical detail, and manifests to the visitor as a jumble of mismatched memorials and statues, largely marketed to foreign tourists as an exhibition of Communist kitsch. Many visitors find humour in the stern or triumphant expressions of the statues themselves (Figure 2); others appear confused by what is effectively a large group of statues and memorials devoid of any context, and displayed together in a designed landscape alongside a motorway in Budapest’s urban-rural hinterland. As a *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1996), it seems ineffective at best, and confusing at worst.

Figure 1: Former Communist era statuary at Szobor Park, Budapest. Photograph by author.

Figure 2: Visitors find humour in the stylised poses and stern expressions of former Communist era statuary at Szobor Park, Budapest. Photograph by author.

The multiplication and replication of heritage and its absence

Szobor Park raises for me two important issues that illustrate the crisis of accumulation of late modern heritage. The first is the way in which the late modern period has come to be characterised not only by its material excess in relation to heritage, but also its haunting by ‘absent heritage’ (Harrison 2012a). I use this term to refer to the ways in which the absences of partially or fully destroyed objects are conserved actively (for example in the case of the niche of the Bamiyan Buddhas which were destroyed by the Taliban and subsequently listed as a World Heritage Site, or the spectral traces of the former Berlin Wall which are actively memorialised by a double brick line which runs through the streets of Berlin) or passively (for example by not rebuilding or replacing something which has been partially destroyed). The trope of the absent, mutilated or toppled statue or memorial has appeared with increasing frequency throughout the twentieth century, and into the early twenty-first, as a metaphor for a humiliated and overthrown political regime. Images of the acts of symbolic humiliation and mutilation of statues and buildings have often been staged or recorded, multiplying and circulating widely in the print, film and later electronic media as part of what Macdonald (2009a) refers to as the ‘visions of endings’ of discredited political regimes. For example, during the ‘de-Stalinization’ which occurred in the former Soviet Union in the decades following the death of Stalin in 1953, many of the former dictator’s statues were removed or defaced. In the 1956 Hungarian Revolution for example, the eight metre tall bronze sculpture of the dictator that topped the Stalin Monument in Budapest’s Városliget city park, which was completed in December 1951 as a gift for Joseph Stalin from the Hungarian People on his seventieth birthday, was cut at the legs using oxy-acetylene torches and torn down. Images of the event were disseminated widely, and came to stand as a symbol of the Revolution itself. However, the boots remained attached to the limestone base and tribune, and the defaced memorial lingered in the central Budapest park for many years as a ‘mockery’ of the former dictator, and the focal point for remembering the uprising which toppled the former regime. The site persisted as a space for the memory of this event, although what remained of the monument slowly deteriorated. More recently, the remnants of the monument were removed to make way for a new Monument of the 1956 Revolution, which was completed in 2006 for the 50th anniversary of the event. A copy of the sculpture of the broken boots standing on a brickwork dais was erected in the same year in ‘Szobor Park’ (see Figure 3).

If the spectral memory of Stalin’s Boots persists in the Városliget City Park in Budapest, it is also replicated in Szobor Park on Budapest’s outskirts. And if the new Monument of the 1956 Revolution which replaced the disgraced Stalin Memorial makes reference not only to itself, but also to the former Statue of Stalin which stood in its place, and to the act of its defacement; the replica at Szobor Park acts as a mnemonic for all three of them, as well as their respective afterlives. Each of the 42 dislocated statues physically present at Szobor Park has at least another ‘absent presence’—a double referent in the space from which they were removed, if not others in the traces of their defacement and in the memorials that have replaced them. This replication and piling up of memories, material and spectral, constitutes a literal haunting of the late modern present by the past.

Figure 3: The reconstruction of the defaced Stalin Memorial Statue at Szobor Park, installed in 2006. Photograph by the author.

Giving heritage a history

Secondly, and equally importantly, the uncanny piling together of this series of heroic, triumphantly posed statues, now disgraced, displaced and humiliated, also stands as a metaphor for the confusing jumble of material and intangible remnants from the past which can accumulate if we do not have the confidence to reconsider our heritages' histories and take the process of managing heritage seriously. Indeed, I would argue that our general reticence to review previous generations' heritage decisions betrays a lack of belief not only in the values of previous generations, but also in those of our own. Elsewhere, I have argued that one of the major shifts in heritage in the late modern period came about partially in response to an increased recognition that heritage values are ascribed rather than intrinsic (see Harrison 2010, 2012a). Throughout the second part of the twentieth century the increased recognition of cultural diversity, the postcolonial critique and the contribution of multiculturalism to western societies created a conundrum—how could the old ideas about a canon of heritage represent the increasing numbers of diasporic communities who now made such a contribution to the character and make-up of society (e.g. see Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007, Tunbridge 2008)? This challenge, together with a recognition that heritage values could not be seen as intrinsic, alongside the influence of the nature conservation movement, led to the development of the concept of representativeness in relation to cultural heritage. This recognises that those in positions of authority cannot always anticipate the places that diverse members of society will find important. By conserving a 'representative sample' of the diverse range of places, objects and practices which are of value to individuals and communities in the world, it is thought that we might safeguard the protection of a sample of places and things that may be recognised as heritage in the future. A representative heritage place or object derives its values from the extent to which it can act as an exemplar of a class of place or type of object. The concept of representativeness was largely borrowed from the idea of biodiversity conservation in natural heritage management, where representative samples of species and habitats are quantified statistically. However, the concept of representativeness raises a broader question of what is to be represented. In the same way that the value of heritage has been recognised as ascribed and not inherent, the values on which we base decisions about what makes heritage representative (or not) must also be flexible and change with time. Although the concept was largely intended to avoid the complication of changing values, to re-introduce a scientific 'universalism' into cultural heritage, it nonetheless stands on a concept of value as attributed, and hence malleable. This has important implications, which need to be carefully worked through.

During the 1980s, the phrase 'cultural resource management' became popular in many Western countries as a way of describing the work of cultural heritage preservation or conservation. However, I would argue that we have actually done very little at all to 'manage' heritage, as this would imply an active process of selecting, conscious pruning and judicious sorting. Instead, we have let heritage accumulate on registers and lists without thinking about what work it does in the present as an ensemble or assemblage of places, objects and practices that are intended to reflect values from the past, which we might take forward with us into the future. Instead, like Szobor Park, we have ended up with a confusing jumble of memorials and mnemonics, some of which might be argued to be of little relevance to contemporary or future societies, as we rarely reconsider the basis for the decisions made to list them, and the values they represent. The fact that we rarely do this relates to an outmoded notion of heritage as a 'canon', which suggests that the values that inform our conservation decisions are universal, and hence not open to discussion. However, this position is inconsistent with a late modern 'representative' model of heritage, in which

decisions are based on a consideration of the values of heritage to diverse and changing constituents, and the need to represent (and be represented by) the exhibition of official heritage. Clearly, if the values on which conservation decisions have been made change, then we should reconsider those conservation decisions that were made based on redundant values. I am not suggesting that heritage is not important, nor that it should be ignored, but if we are to maintain that heritage is not universal, as seems to be agreed by many contemporary heritage practitioners, then it requires regular revision and review to see if it continues to meet the needs of contemporary and future societies.

Forgetting to remember, Remembering to forget

Andreas Huyssen has argued that the late modern period has become ‘saturated’ with memory. This is in response to a growing obsession with potential forgetfulness, which he sees as emerging from the temporal and spatial fracturing of globalisation processes, and the emergence of the Holocaust as a cipher for the failure of the Enlightenment project and the violence of the twentieth century as a whole (2003). He represents the obsessive musealization of the late modern period (as I have done here) as a sort of self-replicating response to the abundance of mnemonic and memorialising devices themselves. Paul Connerton (2009, see also 2008) suggests that the excessive memorialisation of the late modern world can only exacerbate this obsession with social memory, as it ultimately leads to an inability to form collective memories:

The paradox of a culture which manifests so many symptoms of hypermnesia and which yet at the same time is post-mnemonic is a paradox that is resolvable once we see the causal relationship between these two features. Our world is hypermnesic in many of its cultural manifestations, and post-mnemonic in the structures of the political economy. The cultural symptoms of hypermnesia are caused by a political-economic system which systematically generates a post-mnemonic culture—a modernity which forgets (Connerton 2009, p. 146-7).

Marc Augé (2004) has put the case for the importance of collective *forgetting*, or at least the active cultivation of some memories at the expense of others, even more strongly. As in the case of individual memories, societies must be able to forget to form memories properly. If we, as individuals, were able to remember everything, we would not be able to make sense of the information we could recall. Our memories would be saturated with information, and it would be impossible for us to adequately sort through the piles of memories to find the ones that were important to us. As Augé notes, ‘Remembering or forgetting is doing gardener’s work, selecting, pruning. Memories are like plants: there are those that need to be quickly eliminated in order to help the others burgeon, transform, flower’ (2004, p. 17). Indeed, ‘memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea’ (2004, p. 20). In the same way that individuals need to disregard certain memories to remember, Augé says we have a collective ‘duty’ to forget:

Memory and oblivion stand together both are necessary for the full use of time... We must forget in order to remain present, forget in order not to die, forget in order to remain faithful (2004, p. 89).

The process of collective forgetting is thus not one which is opposed to collective memory, but an integral component of it, a work of actively returning to and reevaluating the past anew (see also Forty 1999, Küchler 1999). This has important implications for the way in which we have treated heritage as a universal canon, or in our current more mindfully representational phase of heritage, in accepting past conservation decisions as beyond re-visitation and revision, by simply adding new items to our lists, rather than considering whether any might more helpfully be removed.

Indeed, heritage needs to be perceived as part of a broader social process of consumption, use and disposal. Kevin Hetherington (2004) reminds us that disposal is in fact integral to the process of consumer behaviour: 'disposal...is not primarily about waste but about placing. It is as much a spatial as a temporal category' (2004, p. 159). Disposal is connected directly with concepts of value and processes of ordering and categorisation (Douglas 1966). Hetherington characterises museums as a conduit of disposal, as a space in which objects to which we attribute value are stored and held in a state of suspension so that they do not become rubbish (see also Hetherington 2010). The same, of course, is true for heritage, which gives dying objects, traditions, places and ways of life a 'second life' (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998) through preservation, conservation and exhibition, holding the redundant in abeyance from jettison or discard.

The debates around the relationship between remembering and forgetting are paralleled by discussions that have emerged in relation to the preservation of digital data. Indeed, Urry (2004) argues that digital technologies allow humans to inhabit multiple spaces, and hence are having a significant impact on changing patterns of absence and presence in relation to patterns of dwelling and communicating in the contemporary world. At an official level, UNESCO made a gesture of recognising forms of digital heritage as part of its Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage (UNESCO 2003b). The charter requires member states to develop and enforce legal and institutional frameworks to secure the protection of digital heritage. Its implications are far reaching. At a time when museums and archives are increasingly having to recognise that it is impossible to conserve an example of 'everything' and are shifting towards a thresholds-based system, in which things must be assessed against a series of criteria to qualify for heritage status (and hence preservation), digital heritage presents particular problems. At the time of writing, new government initiatives are being developed in countries such as the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia to attempt to deal with the problem of how to archive digital publications such as websites, as well as government documents and electronic communications that form part of governments' remits as archiving institutions. Given the sheer volume of material being produced, this is pushing governments towards developing selection criteria to limit the material that is archived – to root out the 'treasure' from the 'junk'. Such selection criteria raise the same sorts of problems as the criteria that motivated the 'heritage as canon' model – principally, how can one dominant group in society decide what is significant and worthy of preservation for the future.

Despite this, digital information scholars have expressed concern about the principle of 'total recall' of digital information. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger (2009) mirrors Marc Augé (2004) in suggesting that forgetting is a necessary form of cultural production, a vital decision-making process by which we choose to emphasise and memorialise events that have social value, and forget those which are irrelevant. Further, he exposes the real dangers in the development of a surveillance culture in which all of our actions are traceable and accessible, suggesting we need to put in place systems which give digital information expiry dates and to engage in broader discussions of the value of different types of information and its storage. This debate clearly echoes the sorts of debate that I have suggested are necessary for heritage, in which we look closely at the history of our decisions about heritage and consider the values represented by what we have conserved in the past, for the future.

Whatever the outcomes of these decisions, it is important to acknowledge the responses of museums and other archives to a 'post-representativeness' model of heritage. One of these

responses is the increasing repatriation of materials from museums back to the communities in which they originated. While the push to repatriate Indigenous cultural heritage began with debates in the 1970s over who owns human skeletal materials held in overseas museums, the redistribution of materials to communities who have a stake in them is being seen more and more as a solution to the problem of storage (and in this sense, connects directly with the issue of disposal discussed above). In some ways, this has had the effect of shifting the power balance from official institutions to communities to whom items have been repatriated. It is also leading to the development of new meanings and forms of significance for items of material culture that are in circulation once more – items both remembered and forgotten – as they are put to new uses in terms of the production of identity and locality in the communities who now hold them. Similarly, the question of de-accessioning objects for sale within the context of art galleries and museums is currently developing as an important and contentious topic. The American Association of Museums reviewed its Code of Ethics in 1991 to include a stipulation that proceeds from de-accessioning should only ever be used for the acquisition or direct care of collections. In Europe, most objects in museums are held to be ‘inalienable’; however, in France, debates are still occurring around suggestions made in 2007 that the law be changed to allow the de-accessioning of museum objects for sale. Within this context, museums and other heritage institutions are increasingly shifting focus from their object/place collections to media that do not present the same problems of storage and maintenance in the form of ‘virtual heritage’ collections. Given the current economic difficulties in Europe, it seems these questions will only become more pressing. This highlights the need for robust thinking about the appropriate processes by which existing collections of objects, places and practices, which have been conserved as heritage in the past, might be revaluated in the light of the histories of changing criteria used to evaluate them, and their value to the present and future.

Discussion

While there has been much recent discussion regarding the sustainability of practices which impact on the ‘natural’ environment, there has been much less attention given to the sustainability of contemporary cultural heritage and memory practices in the late modern world. While sustainability discourses are most familiarly deployed in relation to ‘natural’ heritage, the concept might also have some value in considering our current approaches to ‘cultural’ heritage. One good reason for this might be that the separation of ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ realms is an unhelpful construction of modern post-Enlightenment Cartesian dualistic thinking, which does not accurately describe the dynamics of the worlds we inhabit (e.g. Latour 2004). Another is that the principle has facilitated the expansion of the ‘natural’ heritage field to allow it to engage directly with a wide range of economic, social, political, ecological and ‘cultural’ issues (e.g. see Clayton and Radcliffe 1996, Edwards 2005, Norton 2005). Sustainability can be defined quite simply as the capacity to survive and endure. In relation to heritage, I suggest the concept of sustainability forces us to question not only the capacities of various objects, places and practices of heritage to persist, but also whether the pasts which they are actively creating in the present could or should endure into the future. Thinking more sustainably about cultural heritage management means taking account of the pasts which we tend and cultivate using our heritage registers and lists, and actively and equitably managing and pruning those pasts in the present, rather than simply allowing them to replicate and pile one upon the other. Sustainability discourses also focus on the interconnectedness of various ideologies, behaviours, practices, and their environmental, social and economic implications. Sustainability in relation to cultural heritage means broadening the ‘field’ to encompass a range of other social, political, economic and environmental concerns, as well as the connections between them. This finds parallels in

various calls from indigenous and other non-Western minorities, who perceive heritage as relational and emerging from the dialogue between a range of human and non-human actors and their environments, to make more effective connections between the management of natural and cultural heritage (see further discussion in Harrison 2012a).

Conclusion

This paper has raised some provocative, perhaps even heretical questions. However, it seems that such questions flow naturally from a consideration of the ways in which the values which underpin our conservation decisions have changed dramatically over the past three or four decades. These changes have occurred in response to the challenges that have arisen from the globalisation of official heritage practices, and the current crisis of the often indiscriminate accumulation of heterogeneous traces, places and practices of the past in the present which are actively defined, managed and exhibited as heritage. I have identified two processes that have directly contributed to this process. Firstly, the failure to reconsider previous decisions made in relation to the composition of heritage registers and lists. Secondly, the fracturing and replication of memory which occurs in the conservation of absent presences as ‘absent heritage’, drawing on the double and triple referral of the statues of Szobor Park in Budapest as a visual and spatial metaphor. In drawing attention to this crisis, I do not mean to suggest that we should not continue to memorialise or conserve, nor that we should necessarily abandon or overturn the conservation battles that have been won in the past. Indeed, I have argued that heritage, if actively cultivated, has an integral role to play in contemporary societies. But this process of active cultivation also requires us to make brave decisions to actively prune those forms of heritage which are inconsistent with, or hold no continuing value for contemporary and future generations, if heritage and its role in the production of social memory is to remain sustainable. This does not mean returning to a canonical model of heritage in which only the very ‘best’ can be conserved, as this would overturn the very important work which has been done over the past few decades to make sure that heritage is more equal, representative and diverse. Instead, we must open the canonical status of heritage registers and lists to further debate in the hope that we will promote a more informed and democratic engagement with the production of heritage in the future in which not only experts and politicians but also laypersons have a role.

We live in a world in which heritage is ubiquitous, and in which we rarely reconsider the implications of past heritage decisions. Many of our heritage registers and lists throughout the world are overpopulated with particular forms of monuments and buildings which represent outmoded narratives of nation and class distinction. These objects and places often only hold continuing significance for a small group of local or national elites who own and revere them (and who coincidentally also tend to be those most closely involved in the process of making decisions to preserve them). These (and all other forms of heritage) need to be opened up to critical questioning regarding their relevance in the contemporary world. Underpinning this discussion is a concern that we distinguish between active and passive processes of remembering and forgetting, as well as the politics of collective memory and forgetfulness, and that we vigorously safeguard the work of making heritage more diverse and representative, whilst introducing an ethics of sustainability into contemporary heritage practice. Thinking sustainably in relation to heritage not only means making better connections between heritage and other environmental, social, economic and political issues, but also thinking consciously and equitably about the pasts we produce in the present for the future. In the same ways in which some memories are actively cultivated by the memorialisation of absent space, some processes of forgetting are also actively pursued through the removal of traces that are not considered compatible with contemporary versions

of history. And in the same way in which some memories are actively cultivated by the preservation of traces of the past in the present, other traces persist and are ignored. Such traces might later re-emerge as significant sources for the creation of future collective memories, but it is the active process of the production of memory which remains most important in all of this. If conserved traces can behave as mnemonics, so can the spectres of their absence. Clearly all of these processes are embedded within asymmetrical relations of power, which means that they can be employed in both positive (or inclusive) and negative (or exclusive) ways. This draws us away from the idea that memory is passive or implied in the conservation of traces of the past in the present, to see memory as something that we must actively and mindfully produce in conversation with the traces of the past and their spectres. Instead, it means thinking actively about heritage and its role in contemporary society, and foregrounding the ways in which heritage is constantly produced and reproduced in the present. It is only through an active engagement with the present that we can produce the collective memories that will bind us to the future.

Notes

1. I use the term 'listing' throughout the paper, but in other regional or national contexts, the terms 'designation', 'nomination' or 'inscription' may be used. In all of these cases, what is meant is the identification and description of an object, place or practice to convey legal or procedural protection of some form. My intention here is to draw attention to the process of listing or designation as one which not only produces and reproduces particular systems of value, but also one of categorising and ordering modernity (c.f. Law 1993).
2. I use the term *official heritage* to refer to a set of professional practices that are authorised by the state and motivated by some form of legislation or written charter. This represents what most of us would recognise as a contemporary 'operational' definition of heritage as the series of mechanisms by which objects, buildings and landscapes are set apart from the 'everyday' and conserved for their aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or recreational values. In contrast, I use the term *unofficial heritage* to refer to a broad range of practices which are represented using the language of heritage, but which are not recognised by official forms of legislation. Unofficial heritage may manifest in the rather conventional form of buildings or objects which have significance to individuals or communities, but are not recognised by the state as heritage through legislative protection. Or they may manifest in less tangible ways as sets of social practices which surround more tangible forms of both official and unofficial heritage, but which are equally not official recognised (for a more detailed exposition of the differences between official and unofficial heritage, see Harrison 2010).

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