

USES OF HERITAGE, LAURAJANE SMITH. LONDON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2006; PP368
PHOTOGRAPHS, ILLUSTRATIONS, NOTES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX; CASEBOUND (\$US) \$90.00
PAPERBOUND (US) \$31.95.

Laurajane Smith aims in this wide-ranging and richly documented text to use the themes of memory, performance, identity, intangibility, dissonance and place to explore the process of memory making. Beginning with the notion of 'process' instead of 'thing' the author redefines the stuff of heritage conservation theory and practice. Tangible or material culture, she argues, presupposes a Western, elite perspective, privileging a stone cottage over a cement-block dwelling of the same size, for example, or wood over mud, or culturally manipulated landscapes over those without obvious disturbance or reshaping. In fact, she argues in the introduction,

There is, really, no such thing as heritage... there is rather a hegemonic discourse about heritage, which acts to constitute the way we think, talk and write about heritage...

That discourse leaves out the subaltern and alternative approaches and determines on a global scale what the world ought to see as significant and valuable in the traces of diverse cultures.

Smith, trained as an archaeologist, has worked as a cultural resource manager as well as an academic researcher in both Australia and England. She begins the discussion with two chapters on the idea of heritage. Part two examines authorized heritage and presents case studies of English country houses and Australian cultural landscapes. Part three considers responses to authorized heritage. To lay the theoretical groundwork, Smith grounds her discussion deeply in the literature of memory, identity, performance, archaeology, cultural geography and historic heritage conservation/historic preservation. She argues that the authorized heritage discourse (AHD) relies on expert evaluation and discrimination and is promulgated by official heritage agencies and private groups like the various National Trusts.

Although the continual reference to the acronym AHD puts one in mind of an illness, the notion of the authorized heritage discourse is useful as the explanation of the tangible and material culture that can be touched, can be understood as representative of class and nation and can be identified only by those with technical and aesthetic expertise. Smith argues that a more inclusive and multicultural approach to memory making would define 'heritage' as the process of construction of the social and cultural meanings of heritage. She presents a fine history of heritage in western European culture and then unpacks the authority and legitimacy on which preserving the past in western terms relies.

Smith's second chapter addresses the stages or steps in the heritage process and examines how each comes to shape the doing of heritage work. This chapter is particularly important for the literature of heritage conservation/historic preservation because it addresses each element of the interaction among observers/performers, socio-political markers and prompts, preservationists and place. In the new ethnography of heritage that Smith creates here, this chapter breaks down the steps of the process and examines each in considerable detail.

The book then presents case studies of the authorized heritage discourse and its application in the field as well as challenges to its power. The examples – English country houses, Australian shared cultural landscapes, labour museums and the making of community identity – illustrate well the processes at work here.

The telling or displaying of a particular version of heritage, finally, arises out of political and cultural power and a sense of control by the dominant group. The question of who owns history or heritage provokes dissonance in preservation discussions because of the power involved in maintaining the authorized heritage discourse. The authority of those who establish the standards and definitions of significance is challenged by changes in or additions to the official narrative. Indigenous people are identified by Smith as the most prominent of the groups that question the ownership of cultural heritage by others but many groups too wish to own their own stories and present them or not as they choose. The resulting clash of experts in culture – museum curators or the community whose exhibit it is, for example – is profoundly difficult to resolve.

Smith's work deserves wide attention. Her marvelous, thick analysis of the situation presents compelling arguments for fully understanding and dispensing with the AHS and its practice. As a guide to thinking, teaching and practicing in the field, this analysis raises the right questions and provides really provocative and solid answers. Despite the annoying acronym, Smith's complex, multilayered effort challenges heritage practitioners to be both self-reflective and responsive to change.

JANNELLE WARREN-FINDLEY
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY