

***Heritage Keywords: Rhetoric and Redescription in Cultural Heritage.* Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels and Trinidad Rico, eds. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2015. 320 pp.\***

Reviewed by Michael A. Di Giovine

Heritage is a notoriously vague and slippery term, with varying operational meanings espoused by diverse stakeholders (Di Giovine and Cowie 2014). This does not diminish the importance of discourse in the interdisciplinary heritage field, but rather, reveals the power of what Laurajane Smith (2006) famously called the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” to mask complex hegemonic power relations behind reified, taken-for-granted terms. In their impressive co-edited book, *Heritage Keywords: Rhetoric and Redescription in Cultural Heritage*, Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels and Trinidad Rico bring together academics and practitioners to critically examine fifteen key terms that are frequently invoked in the heritage field, often with little reflection as to their contested significances. Terminology is important, these contributions show; the way we talk about, negotiate, evaluate, and re-present heritage all is culturally and linguistically mediated, and has strong material impacts. To break down the hegemonic meanings of these important terms, Lafrenz Samuels points out in her well-written introduction that contributors were tasked with emphasizing the inherent rhetorical dynamic of their use, as well as the change that each of them—and the word heritage itself—continuously undergoes. The result is a cohesive volume containing a number of highly nuanced chapters that begin with discussions of a particular heritage concept, but then depart from it—often to bring in a detailed case study that illustrates the multiple meanings and power differentials that underlie it.

Anna Karlström’s excellent contribution, for example, uses several examples from Laos to complexify our understanding of authenticity, which is dominated by Western-style conservation practice that values the preservation of materiality. But for orthodox Buddhists, the impermanence of life is conveyed through preserving the natural processes of deterioration, and thus ancient objects are lovingly left to decay. Popular Buddhism takes the opposite extreme: merit is mathematically earned through costly material expenditures (including the destruction of something old and valued), and so when a community constructed a large, modern temple to replace its older one, they had no problem razing the latter, even despite the fact it contained some of the oldest surviving wall paintings in Laos. While preservationists would cringe at this—and they attempted to salvage the flakes of these paintings after the temple’s destruction—Karlström points out that authenticity for this community lies in spiritual, not material, values, embodied in a sacred place; she urges readers to reconsider the hierarchy of values—and appropriate uses—we employ to assess and act upon places deemed to be of heritage.

This case elicits questions of who can claim decision-making power, and indeed ownership, of a site deemed to be of extraordinary heritage importance. Alexander Bauer shows that rhetoric is important here: the term “cultural property” is favored over “cultural heritage” by legal and political entities when engaging in discourses concerning material value. Yet the word “property” is reductive and divisive; it connotes alienability and personal sovereignty over an

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object, so that the owner can do anything they see fit to it. Furthermore, property law aims to protect the rights of the owner, not the object; this causes problems when multiple groups claim the right to use the site. Rights, in general, are deconstructed by Lafrenz Samuels in her own chapter, where she presents the interesting case of Tunisia's heritage tourism development program to illustrate how its monetary and managerial success convinced international funding agencies to provide lucrative grants, even as it masked increasing human rights suppression and violations by the government towards its citizenry. Civil society, as Sigrid Van der Auwera shows, has made its way into the dominant discourse of heritage policies, which sees it as integral to democratization processes (a Western concept that is analyzed by Cecilia Rodéhn in another chapter). This is a positive development to be sure, for it acknowledges that governments alone are not the sole heritage stakeholder, and civil organizations may work at the grassroots level for more sustainable development of their heritage. But if the State (or, in the case of Bamiyan, the hegemonic world power) is oppressive, civil society can also be willfully destructive. Democratization therefore may go against the dominant ideology of the heritage business—that is, to safeguard a cultural property against risk above all else, as Trinidad Rico points out. The risk to heritage, she states, regards change in general; yet there are many ways in which a heritage site can change, based on different stakeholders' interests. But since safeguarding against transformations is such a central concept in the heritage field, there is a notable lack of will—as well as assessment instruments—to adequately examine the deep and multifarious motivations behind such material changes.

Equity, then, becomes an important issue—though in the case of heritage tourism development, it often promises more than it can deliver, as Jeffrey Adams' contribution shows. Groups embrace tourism development schemes as a way of ensuring the long-term sustainability and viability of heritage sites, and to achieve economic parity, only to find that its outcomes are unpredictable, unmanageable, and unequal. This causes obvious problems in the heritage field, which also sees these cultural properties as important markers of cultural diversity—a term picked up by Alicia Ebbitt McGill, who examines the Belizean education system's effort to promote national identity in such a multicultural milieu. Her chapter stands as a warning to be mindful of rhetorical uses of culture and diversity, which seem innocuous but which can mask notable power imbalances and hegemonic ideology.

The construction of civil society, despite the fact that it is an “imagined community,” is intimately tied to place. Robert Preucel and Regis Pecos examine the process of placemaking in the Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico, during the disastrous construction of a dam by the US Army Corps of Engineers in the 1960s. At the same time, Cochiti was constrained to cooperate with the US government, the dam destroyed their most sacred sites (and affected the ways they had to treat their ancestors' remains), adversely impacted their farmlands, and changed patterns of interaction with other pueblos.

While Preucel and Pecos' case study shows that places can be constructed through explicit political machination, Melissa Baird demonstrates in her discussion on nature that sometimes implicit understandings create and transform places. Embracing an overly simplified nature versus culture binary, early colonial settlers in New Zealand, for example, failed to grasp indigenous Maori conceptions of place and stewardship for the land, and thus viewed the archipelago as a vast wilderness, devoid of true social significance. They therefore renamed the

land, inscribing European values towards its cultivation and preservation, which translated into uses that were incompatible with those of the Maori. Baird thus urges a “counter-hegemonic” approach to heritage rhetoric, wherein counter-narratives are recognized and taken-for-granted assumptions are challenged. Indeed, too often “experts” claim a monopoly over understanding motivations and values attributed to heritage places, yet when talking with locals on the ground, they can find vastly different impressions, as Joshua Samuels did among residents of Sicily’s failed Fascist-era agricultural towns, whom, he erroneously suspected, would share his idea that they were living amidst “difficult heritage.”

The chapters in this volume can be read or assigned to students individually, but as Rico points out in her afterword, and as I hope it is clear here, the terms are deeply interconnected, and the editors should be congratulated on fostering contributors’ engagement with each other’s work. This is a very cohesive volume, and reading it as a whole thus has its benefits. Nevertheless, nearly all approach the term from a similar theoretical angle—that rhetoric willfully masks political power over heritage sites and the communities that claim them—and most chapters utilize the same small, core set of heritage scholars in their work. There is nothing wrong with this, but for a volume that specifically intends to be counter-hegemonic and discursive, it seems to constrain the argument and reify certain expert voices. It would have been productive to see how experts with different theoretical backgrounds approach heritage rhetoric. Indeed, “critical heritage studies” is a burgeoning field (see Winter 2013)—as testified by the Association of Critical Heritage Studies’ large and vibrant third biennial meeting in Montreal in early June 2016—and there are many voices that take different, yet nevertheless critical and nuanced, approaches towards understanding the rhetorics of heritagization and its effects. (“Expertise,” in fact, is one key word that also could have been addressed in this volume).

While the volume cannot dissect an exhaustive list of terms, embracing other theorists’ work perhaps would have also expanded the types of concepts represented. For example, while tourism is rightly addressed in many of the chapters—particularly those by Adams and Paul Lane—the book does not purport to deal with it directly, despite its inexorable link to the business of heritage. As Adams intimates, this may stem from the tourism literature’s supposed inadequacy with closely and critically interrogating touristic processes, though it does not seem he consulted the rich literature of critical monographs by tourism anthropologists, as Lane’s chapter on sustainability does. Lane’s contribution examines tourism rhetoric contextualizing the Masaai, famously studied by tourism anthropologists like Ed Bruner (2005) and Noel Salazar (2010), whom are cited. In fact, Lane’s chapter could have been entitled “tourism” rather than “sustainability,” since little sustainability theory was tackled directly. This is particularly unfortunate given the growing importance (and intellectual flaccidness) of the term “sustainability,” now that it has entered the mainstream political and popular lexicons. Nevertheless, Lane’s chapter is a strong contribution, deepening our understandings of how “tourism imaginaries” (Salazar and Graburn 2015) are rhetorically constructed.

Indeed, Gabriel Moshenska’s short chapter on memory emphasizes that such remembrances—and, I would say, imaginaries—are constructed through complex phenomena including the construction of narratives informally conveyed through word-of-mouth; the use of media, events, propaganda, and other forms of commemoration that amplify certain narratives; and pitting opposing narratives against one another in the public sphere (something Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

[2014], in her discussion of culinary heritage, has also discussed). Malcolm Cooper's contribution on heritage discourse in Scotland—in which he deconstructs word-for-word the media's rhetoric concerning a restrictive conservation effort by Edinburgh's government—illustrates this point well. Furthermore, Moshenska's piece productively goes against the dominant interpretation of Maurice Halbwachs' (1992) to show that, rather than simply relying on passive carriers, memory requires the agency of individuals to perpetuate it. A similar point is made by Klaus Zehbe in discussing intangible heritage. In the most theoretically innovative of the book's contributions, Zehbe uses the concept of “brain death” (similar to “social death”) to decouple the hegemonic notion that intangible heritage is necessarily and naturally embodied. Rather, just like social death—when society perceives someone as dead, which can occur before, during, or after the body has biologically expired—intangible heritage is a social construct, and can only be living, effective, and actionable—and perceived to be embodied—if and when society believes it to be so.

Amidst the numerous volumes dedicated to critical heritage studies, this volume stands out as the first of its kind to not only produce a useful reference of key concepts in the field, but to induce the readers to question and rethink them. *Heritage Keywords* is a welcomed text that clearly aims to discuss and not define, deconstruct rather than describe. An encyclopedia or dictionary this is not; this book is intended to provoke. In the end, it is a rhetorical piece itself. “Rhetoric mobilizes and motivates,” Lafrenz Samels writes in her introduction, “giving reasons and courses of action” (7). This volume, it is hoped, will motivate scholars and practitioners inside and outside the museum and heritage spheres to think critically and reflexively about the words they use, the power enacted through such rhetoric, and the situated nature of their expertise.

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