Volume 52 • Number 2 • Spring 2018 | Volume 52 • numéro 2 • printemps 2018

**“Introduction: Critical Heritage Studies in Canada”**

Susan L T Ashley & Andrea Terry

Canadian Studies has long been a field that considers how and why the past is valued. This theme issue of the *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d’études canadiennes* examines multiple ways that the past has been valued as *heritage*, understood here as a process that marks places, spaces, people, events, practices, histories, objects, or ideas as important inheritance from the past. We offer a critical examination of this process, questioning how and why valuations of the past are culturally produced, signified, and reproduced as heritage. The research and commentary presented in this issue are part of the growing field of Critical Heritage Studies that looks not only at “authorized” heritage narratives produced through mainstream cultural mediations (Smith 2006) but also at how and why the past is valued by those excluded or marginalized by such knowledge-making.

The articles assembled here engage critically with the process of heritage-making in the Canadian context. Many draw on the debates of the June 2016 Association of Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS) conference in Montreal, where almost 700 international participants focused on the question, “what does heritage change?” Organized by the Canada Research Chair on Urban Heritage at the University de Québec à Montréal in collaboration with Concordia University’s Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, this thematic query offered multiple entry points into the manifestations, discourses, epistemologies, policies, and stakes of heritage, seeking to understand more fully how the past in Canada is valued through dynamic and sometimes conflicting processes, debates, and performances.

This journal issue features new and essential contributions to these critical heritage studies. Critical heritage scholars and practitioners advocate theoretically and politically informed analyses of processes in society that produce and consume heritage, often from a bottom-up perspective (Kean and Ashton 2008; Harrison 2013). While the study of cultural heritage has long included critical perspectives (e.g., Lowenthal 1996; Mackey 1999; Strong-Boag et al. 1999; Bannerji 2000; Gordon 2000; Létourneau 2000), heritage presented through institutional practices is still administered within a predefined political framework, mostly from a top-down perspective, and lacks insight into the public’s interest in and uses of heritage. Critical heritage theorists argue that scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers must “critically engage with the proposition that heritage studies needs to be rebuilt from the ground up” by questioning power relations and inviting “the active participation of people and communities who to date have been marginalised in the creation and management of ‘heritage’” (Smith 2012, 534). Critical engagement requires an opening up to a wider and innovative range of intellectual theory, techniques of study, and political interventions. Such a requirement has been pointedly underscored in the wake of the federal government’s Canada 150 campaign that marked the 150th anniversary of Confederation (2017), following the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s activities (2010–15), which cast “an undeniable light on mechanisms and effects of Canada’s colonial formation that reverberate ... in the present” (Decter and Taunton 2013, 66). Individuals and collectives challenged the Canada 150 campaign in various ways, such as initiating L’autre 150e in Quebec and Canada 150+ in Vancouver, and employing Twitter as a platform using the handle @resistance150.

In bringing together a range of perspectives regarding the constitution and uses of heritage in Canada through the lens of critical heritage studies, the essays featured here collectively signal the fact that heritage is a cultural phenomenon; both tangible resources and intangible sensibilities or practices inform people’s relationships with and valuations of the past. In Canada, the official portrait of heritage offered in the public sphere tends to present Canada as a settler nation with a bilingual framework, coloured by celebratory multicultural diversity. But Indigenous communities’ activisms and global-scale movements of people, ideas, and technologies (Appadurai 1996; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Palmater 2011) challenge authorized systems and discourses of power that constitute established group/community/national identities and the nature of Canadian heritage. Authors in this special issue explore the limitations and possibilities manifest in how heritage has been framed, deployed, produced, signified, and consumed within these *heritagization* processes in Canada. This requires critical enquiry by scholars, cultural producers, and heritage practitioners across multiple disciplines, into everyday practices as well as institutionalized objects, to engage with the complexity of the topic.

While heritagization marks things or practices from the past as important (Sánchez-Carretero 2013), who undertakes the valuation, and for what reasons, and who is viewing or consuming, affects and alters the nature of the process. On the one hand, marking what has heritage value has long been seen as an institutionalizing process. In Canada, heritagization has been uniquely important, driven by the federal government department of Canadian Heritage, the umbrella department for a changing mixture of arts, culture, and heritage, and multicultural programs. Canadian Heritage was established to oversee matters “relating to Canadian identity and values, cultural development, heritage and areas of natural or historical significance to the nation.” This relied on the troubled normative ideal of multicultural nationalism (Taylor 1994), with a tendency to culturalize structural and societal inequalities. But heritagization is, on the other hand, a performative act: an active, affective, or artistic expression of individual and community senses of self (Robertson 2012). It can be understood as a process of cultural production by which people make sense of their world and their place within it, as well as strategically assert their voices in the public sphere (Simon and Ashley 2010). In this process, peoples seek to retain the ability to make worlds (choose, express, and change their rooted identities) in ways that they control socially, economically, and politically (Arendt 1958).

We want to express our great appreciation and gratitude to all those who made this publication possible. Thank you to the contributors, as well as to the many reviewers across Canada who provided timely, thoughtful, and essential anonymous peer assessments of the articles. We are especially grateful to Lucie Morisset for her co-editing of this special issue and her contextual historical essay on patrimoine and heritage in Canada. To Andrew Nurse who provided valuable feedback as we initially conceived of this issue and to Marian Bredin, editor of the *JCS/REC*, your support and encouragement have proven pivotal, and we thank you for working so diligently with us.

.

**References**

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis and New York: University of Minneapolis Press.

Arendt, H., 1958. The public and private realm. In: *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 22–78.

Ashton, Paul and Kean, Hilda eds. 2008. *People and their pasts: public history today*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bannerji, Himani. 2000. *Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender.*

Canadian Scholars’ Press.

Canadian Heritage. “Mission.” Web. Accessed 14 December 2004. http://www.pch.gc.ca/pc-ch/org/mission/tex\_e.cfm

Decter, Leah and Carla Taunton. 2016. “Decolonial Cultural Practices: Advancing Critical Settler Methodologies.” *Horaire et résumés Schedule and Abstracts Congrès 2016 de l’Association d’art des universités du Canada / 2016 Conference of the Universities Art Association of Canada.* Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal.

Gordon, Alan. 2001. *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal’s Public Memories, 1891-1930.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001.

Harrison, Rodney. 2013. *Heritage: critical approaches*. London & New York: Routledge.

Létourneau, Jocelyn. 2000. *Passer à l’avenir: histoire, mémoire, identité dans le Québec d’aujourd’hui.* Boréal.

Lowenthal, David. 1996. *Possessed by the past: The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*. New York: The Free Press.

Mackey, Eva. 1999. *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada.* Taylor and Francis.

Palmater, Pamela D. 2011. *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity*. UBC Press.

**Robertson, Iain, ed. 2012.** *Heritage from Below*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Sánchez-Carretero, Cristina. “Significance and social value of cultural heritage: analyzing the fractures of heritage.” In *Science and Technology for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*. M. A. Rogerio-Candelera. M. Lazzari (eds.). London: Taylor & Francis, pp. 387-392.

Simon, R. I., & Ashley, S. L T (2010). Heritage and practices of public formation. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *16*(4), 247-254.

Smith, Laurajane. 2006. *Uses of heritage*. London & New York: Routledge.

Smith, Laurajane. 2012. “A critical heritage studies”. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *18*(6), pp.533-40.

Strong-Boag, Veronica, Sherrill Grace, Avigail Eisenberg, and Joan Anderson, eds. 1999. *Painting the Maple: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Construction of Canada.* UBC Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1995. “The politics of recognition.” In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. A. Gutman ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 25-74.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 1999. *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. London & New York: Zed Books.