Heritage and Social Class

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> *Looking back, it's funny how quick it's all changed – a half century of growth in pits, buildings and people . . . and then just as dramatic, the slump of the 1920s and 1930s when there was suddenly no demand for coal and half our people were out of work and thousands left for good. Only the Second World War ended that, and decent times came again in the 40s and 1950s . . .*
>
> *I suppose, through it all, we survived because, in a way, the getting of coal had made us a community. We've had our famous sons and daughters, like everyone else, but it's the ordinary people who really gave salt to our lives . . . Ordinary? They were bloody extraordinary.*

Introduction: From the Rhondda to Alnwick Castle

This is the voice of 'ordinary' Bryn Rees, a retired miner from the Rhondda Valleys in South Wales, UK, addressing visitors to the colliery where he used to work. It has now become the Rhondda Heritage Park, a 'living history' heritage centre, where Bryn tells the story of his life in the 1950s, shortly after nationalization of the coal industry. He is speaking from a time of collective and organizational strength for coal-miners and other industrial workers. Yet his optimism, as we know, proved false, given that those ever-quickening changes sweeping him and other miners along ultimately proved fatal to the UK and European coal industry. Listeners have stepped into this 1950s world from one virtually bereft of its old centres of industrial monopoly – in coal, steel, shipbuilding, railways – which have now become either ruined and impoverished or regenerated into new consumer-oriented urban areas. Bryn's words, therefore, evoke a sense of loss and powerlessness. It is a loss that is also, inevitably, about the loss of a cultural image of the working class. Manual industrial

occupations are memorialized in a range of 'ordinary' heritage sites in the UK. Beamish Open Air Museum in Tyneside, Big Pit in Wales, Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire, Quarry Bank Mill near Manchester, the Welsh Slate Museum at Llanberis, Museum of London Docklands, the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, the People's History Museum in Manchester, and others besides, all display working-class lives, communities and occupations. They tell the stories of 'ordinary' people who, thanks to the conversion of old industrial sites into new 'vernacular' heritage, have now gained a public stage as 'extraordinary' characters.

Let us now leave the Rhondda for a moment and travel up to northern England, to Northumberland, where visitors can explore magnificent Alnwick Castle. This castle belongs to the ancient Percy barony, dating from the Norman Conquest. The present 12th Duke of Northumberland welcomes visitors in his Foreword to the castle's official guidebook (1999, p. 1). There he affirms that his family's 700 years at Alnwick have witnessed a history of 'war and peace, cruelty and benevolence, of artistic patronage, building and innovation on a scale to rival any house in Britain'. The sumptuous eighteenth-century drawing room is complete with ornate ceiling, fireplaces, floors and woodcarvings in the Roman cinquecento style. In the guidebook, the motifs are of ancient dynasties, the interconnections among European aristocratic families, military prowess, master–servant relationships and ever-shifting court, church and state relations. The current Duke takes care to connect the castle's architectural, dynastic and historical values with the humbler values of family and feeling. Lest we think, for instance, that the castle's lavish Italianate grandeur might have cowed its young occupants, he explains 'thankfully it is also a wonderful home' which he and his siblings treated 'as a huge playroom, not appreciating the priceless paintings and furniture that were often targets for water pistols and arrows!'

What separates these two contrasting instances of heritage is the vast social, cultural and economic gap between them, yet in neither is the concept of 'class' invoked. Both seek to place their particular history on the national stage, and to include the visitor within it – but on very different terms. It has been argued that class often figures in cultural texts as an 'absent presence': its effects pernicious but its existence rarely acknowledged (Bromley, 2000). In the UK at least, it has an 'understated ubiquity' (Skeggs, 2004, p. 117), whereby a public reticence about naming class gives it what Savage (2005) terms an 'everywhere and nowhere' quality. It structures social and cultural relationships but is rarely articulated, enabling a pervasive ideology of individual opportunity and meritocracy to go unchallenged (Sennet and Cobb, 1973). I have argued elsewhere (Dicks, 2008) that coal-mining heritage asserts the collective strength of mining communities while avoiding the language of class, with the effect of depoliticizing the history presented.

At the Rhondda Heritage Park, miners' work is represented as collective labour – shaped by the rhythms of the colliery, the hardships endured and the strong community spirit (Dicks, 2000). Their agency comes from their labour, but, as Connerton reminds us, while 'the modern world is the product of a gigantic process of labour . . . the first thing to be forgotten is the labour process itself' (2009, p. 40). Alnwick's magnificent fireplaces become signs of the family's wealth rather than of the stonemasons' craft. The Northumberlands' efforts are not presented as labour but as the lifeworks of individual successors – performed in the interests of the family 'name', its property and its continuity, following their chosen career paths and artistic inclinations. This individualized effort and its resultant 'treasure-houses' acquire a legitimacy, timelessness and continuity that are depicted as being at one with the interests of the nation-state, and even emblematic of its power (Mandler, 1997). In the Rhondda, meanwhile, the miners are depicted as labouring tirelessly for others in settings and under conditions over which they have no control. Their history is represented as a long 'struggle for justice' against the mine-owners, through a series of pre-war strikes and confrontations, until finally the narrative enters the 1950s when 'times changed' (Dicks, 1999). The Heritage Park is silent about the 1980s and beyond, but it is clear to the visitor that the Rhondda miners' power has dissipated with the 'quick changes' Bryn mentions. The Northumberlands' 700-year tenure, meanwhile, has endured, in spite of Alnwick's history of 'war and cruelty'.

If the working class are frequently depicted as facing extinction while the aristocrats carry forward the nation's historical banner, it would seem, meanwhile, that the middle class is a largely absent category in heritage. It is, of course, they who, predominantly, visit country houses and, indeed, museums (Merriman, 1991; though he points out the 'lower social status' of social history museum visitors, as below). However, the middle classes rarely appear on display as such. Admittedly, social history museums such as the London Transport Museum and the Imperial War Museum often recognize the different historical experiences of middle-class as opposed to working-class families. However, we do not (yet) have a museum of the 'suburbs'[1] or the 'gentrified countryside'! This relates to Skeggs' (2004) observation that in public discourse working-class people are typically depicted as constituting a group with 'a culture', possessing a set of colourful cultural markers, while the middle class becomes the unmarked norm (and the aristocrats largely figure as private individuals and their families).

What is 'heritage' and what is 'class'?

Let us start our discussion of heritage and class by defining what we mean by both. Heritage, first, is a term covering a very broad compass. As Samuel's (1994)

encyclopaedic tour of popular heritage practices illustrates, it is not confined to public, exhibitionary sites but covers a huge diversity of private 'vernacular' practices such as stamp-collecting, metal-detecting and family-tree-making. This reminds us that heritage spills out far beyond the purview of professionals, be they historians, interpreters or city planners. Nevertheless, this chapter will focus on heritage as it appears in visitable sites open to the public such as history museums, heritage sites and restored buildings. These allow us to investigate which (and whose) heritage has attracted funding and become publicly affirmed, institutionalized and (often) instrumentalized for the visitor gaze. The ways in which class is bound up with this gaze offer insights into the symbolic workings of class itself and the many classed dimensions of our relationship with 'the past'.

Class is one of the most well-established yet controversial terms in both social science and media discourse. Within sociology, my own disciplinary area, it was common to declare in the 1980s and 1990s that class was no longer relevant, having been superseded by other forms of social identity and inequality, such as gender, 'race' and sexuality. However, since the turn of the millennium class analysis has been undergoing somewhat of a renaissance. Prominent sociologists in the UK and the US are reasserting and seeking to understand the ongoing and deep effects of class divisions on social life (Savage, 2000; Reay, 2005; Russo and Linkon, 2005; Sayer, 2005). Much of this new class analysis has moved away from treating class as purely an objective, measurable socioeconomic category (as in Goldthorpe's classic work) to more cultural, symbolic and affective definitions. These recognize the ways in which, as Skeggs (2004, p. 117) affirms, class is rarely directly referenced or acknowledged in public cultural representations but instead assumes a multiplicity of disguises, illustrating the extent to which the symbolic is 'absolutely central' to any understanding of class. Such symbols include heritage images of workers' 'heroic potency' (Munt, 2000, p. 10) in which they can be pictured as industrious upholders of communal values of solidarity, social cohesion and collective 'spirit'. Outside of heritage, however, it seems that working-class people are most often depicted today as defective consumers (Bauman, 1998; Owen, 2011).

'National heritage', 'the people' and nostalgia

There is a long history of 'exclusivity' and elitism in relation to heritage, which came increasingly under attack from the 1980s onwards. Smith (2006) describes how, in providing tax breaks for aristocratic families fallen on hard times, the UK's National Trust (whose original remit was to preserve open spaces for ordinary urban dwellers) began from the 1930s to privilege the acquisition and opening up of manorial and country homes. This helped establish the country's erstwhile ruling elites as significant beneficiaries of a large part of the

UK's state-supported heritage. Such 'elite' heritage, which also includes state monuments, memorials, church buildings, royal palaces and gardens, constitutes for Smith an example of the 'authorized heritage discourse', or AHD (Smith, 2006, p. 29). This represents traditional, inherited and state-promoted ideas of the 'heart of the nation' and identifies legitimate spokespersons of the past while denying others. It defines what is – and what is not – 'our' inheritance; it promotes ideas of an unchanging past, disconnected from the present, and it presents safe, non-challenging (especially national) narratives. These pay particular homage to rare possessions, collections and acquisitions, allowing ruling-class groups to establish the 'importance of material culture in demonstrating lineage, cultural and social achievement and power' (Smith, 2006, p. 23).

Earlier, in the UK context, Bommes and Wright (1982, p. 266) had identified a similar matrix of 'National Heritage' belonging to an 'Imaginary Briton'. A unified, non-contradictory, serene, immobilized, and yet vague and imprecise national subjectivity 'functions by excluding traditions which it cannot incorporate'. They argue that National Heritage, as 'the historicized image of the establishment', is class culture naturalized as 'national' (Bommes and Wright, 1982, p. 271). Such arguments kick-started a decade of academic wrangling over the functions (social, political, ideological) of heritage. Wright (1985) identified the 'heritagization' of Britain and promotion of 'our' British way of life as a Thatcher-era ideological strategy for securing allegiance to the national imaginary. For Hewison (1987), heritage promotes old cultural securities to mask the economic decline of deindustrialized Britain in the new global economy. It ensures that the populace, busy smiling on the past, has its back turned to the politics of the present. In this argument, neither the Alnwick nor the Rhondda version of heritage is authentic, since they manipulate the past through the 'filter of nostalgia' (Hewison, 1999, p. 161). Certainly, industrial heritage can peddle National Heritage myths as readily as elite heritage. West (1988) argues of Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire that its collection of industrial heritage museums and buildings celebrates capitalist industrialization by ignoring labour relations (both now and in the past) in favour of a 'professional-managerial' focus on industrial archaeology. Workers, employed by the Museum on degraded contracts, are merely the operatives of machines invented by great 'innovators' who testify to the nation's technological achievements.

Such arguments were taken up by the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies (BCCC) in the 1970s, which advanced an Althusserian critique of heritage institutions as ideological 'historical apparatuses' producing a 'dominant memory' which, while 'open to contestation', served to buttress state institutions (Popular Memory Group, 1982, p. 207). Yet, as Robins (1995) notes, Foucault's idea of a 'popular memory' that is denied existence 'so people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been' raised the issue

of how subaltern experiences might be recovered (Foucault, 1975, p. 25, cited in Robins, 1995, p. 202). The British Cultural Studies idea of 'the popular' as a site of ideological contest, influenced by Gramscian perspectives, provided a means of addressing this possibility. Hegemony theory suggested that heritage could be seen as a battleground between popular and dominant memory both in the public sphere (of representations) and in the private sphere (of letters, memorabilia, oral histories, memories, etc.). This echoes Bommes and Wright's conception of 'public memory' as a struggle between dominant and subordinate social frameworks.

The BCCC Popular Memory Group proposed seeing popular memory as a political practice, not as a study *of* the past but as its 'living active existence in the present' (Popular Memory Group, 1982, p. 211). Rather than seeing people's memories as distorted by dominant ideology, these studies took them as real in the sense that they were able, however problematically, to point to the truth of situated experience. Work in the UK on the recovery of 'ordinary' memories was also developing rapidly through the Oral History Society and prominent oral historians such as Paul Thompson (see *The Edwardians*, 1975). Further, Raphael Samuel's founding of the History Workshop Movement at Ruskin College elaborated the concept of 'history from below'. This differed from labour history in its concern not with the formal institutions of organized labour so much as with traditions of popular protest and unorganized, lived experience.

Yet there is a risk in 'history from below' of unifying diverse experiences under the banner of class. This is critiqued in post-structuralist theory for suggesting that 'the features and positions of the working class are given for all time' (MacCabe, 1981, pp. 317–18, cited in Robins, 1995, p. 203). Samuel, aware of the problem, acknowledges that 'unofficial' history can risk lapsing into uncritical simplicities such as 'grandmother's washing day' (Samuel, 1994). Bommes and Wright (1982, p. 300), likewise, warn that attempts to recover subaltern voices can readily be incorporated as the 'people's humble contribution to the heritage of the nation'. This impasse seems to leave heritage assigned to either populist or conservative versions, neither of which allows complex linkages between ordinary, individual experiences and wider historical conditions to come to the fore, as originally urged by the Popular Memory Group. Lumley (1994) restates the problem as the need to distinguish a heritage impulse which resists change in favour of the 'timeless' and 'natural' appeals of the 'folk', the 'old days' and the 'community' from one that acknowledges the ordinary, the vernacular and the idiosyncratic as part of a multi-vocal 'people's history'.

This appeal of the 'vernacular' in a late-modern technological age suggests complex connections between the figure of the industrial worker and the present. As Strangleman (1999, p. 728) notes, nostalgia can be a 'powerful resource for the sustaining of occupational identity' since it allows 'restructured' workers to retrieve a sense of 'ontological security' (see also Davis, 1979).

Collective strength can be found in looking back as a means of fostering resistance to present degradations. While, for some, nostalgia evokes 'a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world' (Tannock, 1995, p. 454), I have argued that it can serve instead to foreground the interplay between now and then (Dicks, 2004). As Thompson (1995) argues of the turn-of-the-millennium yearning for tradition, such a longing is a symptom of modernity (not a reaction to it), which stimulates fast-changing, mobile perspectives through 'disembedding' communication technologies. These allow traditions to be experienced outside their erstwhile contexts of moral authority, constraint and obligation, and to be 're-moored' in new, fluid and diverse situations (Thompson, 1995, pp. 183–91). Spectators of vernacular heritage can in this way explore the gains and losses of their own past without the dead weight of actually living it.

Therefore, it may be over-simple to define vernacular heritage as backward-looking. As Sandberg (1995) suggests in his analysis of the world's first folk museum in Sweden, what visitors may experience instead is an 'in-betweenness' of temporal location. At Skansen, newly urbanized and mobile ex-peasant families at the turn of the twentieth century could enter and examine from the inside a living tableau of their own rural, immobile pasts. They could participate (in a re-created experience of the past) and at the same time not participate (in its reality). Similarly, at the turn of the twenty-first century, industrial heritage preserves and displays an ordinary and working-class world, but at the later historical juncture of deindustrialization and entry into a new phase of global consumer capitalism (Dicks, 2004). Now, when working-class experiences and ontologies are cast aside and in danger of being forgotten or denigrated in the public eye, it seems important, as Bryn says, to 'look back, to see how quickly it's all changed'. This does not necessarily imply a desire to *go* back.

Class, collective memory, place and industrial ruination

The idea of heritage as offering an 'in-between' threshold suggests that the past is always appropriated from a particular vantage point in the present. Memories, therefore, cannot be seen as transparent, individual residues in need of simple unearthing. As Halbwachs (1980) reminds us, memories are social: they are created in the present through reflecting on the past, so that 'in reality, we are never alone' for 'we always carry with us and in us a number of distinct persons' who are part of our memories and helped us make them (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 23). These 'collective' memories may well never find their way into the formal histories of that group's epoch, which are constructed according to rules, evaluations and selections to which the group were not subject. This suggests that collective memories can function as repositories for 'subaltern and

dissenting heritage discourses' (Smith, 2006, p. 35) and for 'unofficial knowledge' (Samuel, 1994, p. 3). For Halbwachs (1980, pp. 78–9), such memories only remain intact as long as the group continue to interact, and will eventually 'fade and break up', never to be recovered. For Samuel, fragments of 'popular' memory can always be gleaned and made sense of by using unofficial sources – such as oral tradition, personal memoirs, children's songs and rhymes, and so on.

Halbwachs's insight that those sharing social milieux forge common memories should not commit us to unhelpful notions of unitary collective identities. The extent to which 'collective' memories circulate in local groupings is something to explore rather than assume. There is always the possibility of forms of 'mnemonic resistance' to well-rehearsed, circulating memories (Ryan, 2010), undermining the project of retrieving, capturing and displaying memories as straightforwardly and authentically 'working-class'. Robertson (2013, p. 59) gives the example of the Isle of Lewis memorial cairns, constructed by small committees of local people who worked with a local artist on the memorial designs. As the study shows, even such locally managed projects can stir up internal conflict over who has the right to determine what happens on the ground, indicating that 'dissonance and contestation are intrinsic to any attempt to write heritage into the landscape' (Robertson, 2013, p. 64). In the Lewis case, this led to two alternative cairns being erected by groups who thought of themselves as more authentically working-class than the committees, more able to speak for the places and events being memorialized.

Place is always important in heritage, as memories are produced in and through particular places, journeys and mobilities (Urry, 1996). Relationships to place can be said to differ in a number of respects with respect to class. Working-class families whose ability to earn rests on manual labour are more dependent on place, at the mercy of non-local ebbs and flows of capital investment and disinvestment, than those with non-manual, 'transferable' skills and professions. This means that working-class heritage is often defined by change and migration as much as by community and belonging. Thus, working-class households are geographically mobile in a different way from the middle class, whose moves tend to reflect individual career trajectories. Both, in turn, are different from the manorial aristocracy, whose country 'seats' root them in specific, fixed terrains – even as their individual adventurers and entrepreneurs travel the globe.

Those in industrial, low-grade occupations work primarily with their hands. Their materials and tools, environments, buildings, workshops and machines tend to be destroyed and soon replaced with the next wave of investment. This can give rise to chronic and profound feelings of dislocation in areas of industrial ruination as the material culture of generations disappears (Mah, 2010). As Walkerdine (2010, p. 111) describes, the razing of the hugely dominant

steelworks in the south Wales town she studied created 'a hole at the centre of the community's imaginary ego-skin'. It symbolized the disintegration of a temporally and spatially organized grid of previously interconnected social practices and places (between the steelworks and the houses, the houses and the streets, the paths and the fences, the women and their neighbours, etc.) Workshops, manufacturing plants and mines in industrial areas were part of a whole emplaced labour process that connected them economically, socially and geographically to each other. This can give rise to strongly felt desires to preserve 'ordinary' objects and landscapes.

Objects, bodies, affect and performance

In the Rhondda, interviews carried out with the ex-miner guides revealed how important these networks were, and how their loss, and the loss of the materials and artefacts that were exchanged within them, was keenly felt. A leading ex-miner and trades unionist active in the preservation of the colliery, Dai, explained how frustrated he and others were by the failure of the Heritage Park to provide a haven for all the machinery and artefacts from the collieries rapidly closing down around them. He described how

> It was a terrible waste, with things being cut up with Oxyacetylene and then the engineers phoning me from Lady Windsor [a nearby colliery] and saying, 'Dai, for Christ's sake, are you going to come and pick this stuff up because the scrap merchant's coming and they're going to have it and I don't want to see stuff going into skips but I can't hold it much longer'. I got so bloody frustrated in the end I went over to Aberycynon colliery which was intact but closed and we actually piled a load of stuff into the boot of my car out of the winding engine that we need here. And the car was right down on its bloody axle almost and I brought it over myself.

The point for the redundant miners was to save the material signs of their past, because these were the objects and artefacts that were the remainders of lived experience: 'the paraphernalia we were used to', as Dai put it.

Further, manual labour involves collective experiences of bodily exertions, strains, emotions and stresses that testify to the embodied nature of memory. Many ex-miners spoke of the discipline they were subject to in the mine and the ways in which their bodies were corralled, searched, surveyed and controlled. As Ewan, another ex-miner guide, explains to the visitors about the non-stop winding of the pit-cage:

> But that gate there would be lifted up, see, the men would go in, they would drop the gate down, and from 6 till 7 in the morning, they would get the men underground. Every two minutes, there would be about 25 men

> dropping down the mine. Then 7 o'clock, a big steam hooter would blow, and that meant, if you was hanging about by here and you wasn't in that cage, you would be sent home. Because once 7 o'clock came, that same container was fetching the coal up. And it never stopped winding coal at all then throughout the rest of the day. . . . Now if you had a migraine or a toothache and you wanted to go home, they wouldn't let you . . . because this would only stop if someone was immobilized.

Dai, in his tour, tells a complementary story of his first day at the pit:

> These men, 25 at a time – were going into these cages and going down the pit, vanishing before your eyes as it were. And I can remember . . . my heart started to beat a bit fast, because everything was done so violently. Steam, noises of cages like this coming to the surface, hitting the gates up in the air and shuddering to a stop and men getting in and disappearing, until our turn came. And you could feel the draw of the air as you got nearer to the top of the shaft. . . . Get in, in the cage, [noise of Dai slamming cage door] Ding, ding, ding, and away she started to go, and when I say go, I mean *plummeting*.

These vivid narratives, told from the guides' own autobiographical perspectives, testify to how heritage performance can bring industrial workplaces to life in a way that situates individual experiences within wider historical conditions.

In the tour guides' stories, these memories are sedimented and performed for visitors over and over again. As opposed to formal guided tours in country houses, such performance is not about empty places but places with bodies, laden with affect. As Connerton (2009) reminds us, places are not mnemonic unless they are lived in. This power of objects to evoke collective memories means that, as Johnstone (1998) suggests, heritage sites can function as 'substitute heirlooms'. They offer visitors the sensation of seeing 'their own' personal realm displayed and verified in the public collection – 'my granny had one of those!' Official memorials, by contrast, are explicitly designated as such and are selective: they forget important – often disturbing – elements and promote others (Connerton, 2009, p. 29). The formal country house interior, designed to show off art and furnishings, can be said to act as a memorial rather than a locus of memory (although for the Northumberland family it presumably does both).

Visitor studies of class and heritage

As Beiner (2008) remarks in relation to film, the heritage site itself does not remember; it is only through visitors' and audiences' constructions of the narratives presented that memories are invoked. Traditionally, visitors to

museums have been shown to be highly educated, middle and upper-middle-class groups, who feel at home among the formal classifications at work in museum displays. This is why museum-going, as famously studied by Bourdieu et al. in *The Love of Art* (1997), and by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984), usually figures as a marker of high cultural capital. There is some evidence that visitors to social history museums and industrial heritage sites are less uniformly middle-class than those to art museums, however. Smith (2006, p. 208) surveyed three such UK museums (Beamish, the National Coalmining Museum and the Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum) and found that their visitors were three times more likely to have working-class occupations than visitors to country house sites. She also found that, unlike the latter, visitors to the industrial sites valued intangible heritage (memory, tradition, skills, family history, etc.) more than tangible, material heritage; they saw the site as educational (in a way that country house visitors did not); and nostalgia was expressed more as the activity of remembering lost family and neighbourhood ties than as a reverence for better times. Unlike the formal categories of art and collecting museums, and unlike the impersonal display of sumptuous wealth at Alnwick Castle, 'ordinary' heritage as narrated by Bryn Rees at the Rhondda Heritage Park insinuates a personal, affective relationship between the specific, narrated past and the legatees or inheritors of that past. This invites visitors to identify themselves as the legatees, raising questions as to how close or distant they feel to the stories presented. Memory and generation play a crucial role in this relationship.

Many visitor studies tend to investigate museums as the purveyors of messages that are 'responded to' by visitors, or that can be 'evaluated' in terms of learning outcomes (e.g. Falk and Dierking, 2000). In these approaches, class is usually operationalized as a set of demographic characteristics that can be measured as standardized variables, such as occupation, income, educational qualifications, and so on. This returns us to the problem, earlier identified, of adducing an *a priori* fixity or essentialism to class. A different way of conceptualizing visitor interactions with museums approaches this not so much in terms of messages and informational content, as an encounter between differently positioned individuals and the specific symbolic invitations and 'challenges' with which exhibitions confront them. This draws upon a theorization of class influenced by Bourdieu's work on habitus, which does not reduce it to static variables possessed by individuals but examines practices of active position-taking by individuals in relation to cultural texts and institutions.

In this perspective, visitors are spoken to by public exhibitions – and themselves speak 'back' – from a social position that is structured by their prior social and psychological dispositions. Visitors come to the museum trailing a largely unconscious history of habits of thought, schemes and memories which provide the immediate standpoint from which they relate to the history presented to them. Rather than being a collection of stored mental items, this is a felt,

subjective and embodied positioning based on the accumulation of prior bodily habits and dispositions. But Bourdieu (1977, p. 86) decisively rejects the idea that all members of the same class internalize the same 'structures, schemes of perception, conception and action' as though all members' schemes were substitutable and impersonal. Instead, he recognizes the 'organic individuality' and 'particularities of the individual ego', which are related to objective class and habitus but are not fixed by them (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86). Members of the same class or group are thus likely to be receptive in similar ways to similar histories, not because habitus operates identically for them, or because they share the same life experiences or trajectories (they do not), but because the habitus 'brings about a unique integration, dominated by the earliest experiences, of the experiences statistically common to the members of the same class' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 87).

This is a fruitful way of capturing the significance of class effects in visiting, because class is made manifest through position-taking behaviour rather than through conformity to a priori sets of worldviews or shared situations. This directs research to illuminate how active processes of identification and disidentification, self/other relations and near/far experiences impinge on visitor imaginaries of what history was and is. Fyfe and Ross (1996), for example, show how visitors and, just as importantly, non-visitors to the Staffordshire potteries museums they studied adopt different types of 'gaze' on local history ('local working-class', 'cosmopolitan middle-class' and 'local middle-class') which is structured by class habitus in combination with individual trajectories of migration, settlement, education and occupational opportunity. Rather than fixed class identities, these standpoints are bound up with families' experiences of belonging and commitment to the place they have ended up living in and to the ways in which they think of 'leisure' and 'history'. Middle-class 'outsiders' embracing cosmopolitan values contrast with middle-class 'insiders' identifying with older values of community.

The research I conducted in the Rhondda demonstrates, in a similar way, that an important determinant of how visitors relate to mining history centres on their own relationship (social, political, biographical, cultural) to a particular mining 'imaginary', framing what visitors find salient in the museum display (Dicks, 2000). Interviews with visitors indicated that virtually all received the same particular message from the museum, namely, that the miners' story constituted a long 'struggle for justice'. However, within this broad message it was also clear that visitors adopted different subjective positions in relation to this story. For some, it was obsolete, having little relevance for their current lives and being of merely anachronistic interest. For others, it functioned largely as a springboard for their own memories and reminiscences. A third grouping actively engaged with the story as a means of making sense of their own lives. This largely depended on how visitors positioned themselves in relation to

mining itself, which is where class habitus comes in. Some middle-class visitors, such as an engineer and his family, acclaimed the end of mining as a new phase in the local environment where a regreened landscape could re-establish itself and local people could 'move on' because 'I can't see much future for people like that.' For some working-class visitors from urban, service-sector backgrounds, the struggle for justice was about 'the old days' as 'I'm not interested really in the modern.' A history professor from Canada on a voyage of rediscovery of his own ancestral roots positioned the miners' struggle for justice as an ongoing story of working-class heroes whose message was 'a demonstration of the human spirit if it's not a demonstration of justice'.

Working-class visitors from industrial backgrounds tended to relate to the story from a range of identifications on a continuum from the most directly personal – where they had first-hand experience of mining and saw the Rhondda people as 'just like us' because 'we've always had to struggle for what we've got' – through the largely anecdotal, often rooted in the personal reminiscences and handed-down stories of friends and relatives. In one or two instances, the displays seemed to enable working-class visitors to draw direct parallels between the miners' struggle for justice and their own working lives, as in the following quote from a Cardiff electronics factory worker:

> There's better unity in the mines, than our, than this type of factory I'm working in. Because, if somebody got sacked tomorrow, for whatever reason, people would just say, 'oh, too bad', like. But, in the mines, I hear it's more like if you got the sack, then they'd all get together. It's a very selfish type of attitude in our factory. Everybody's out for their own. They don't care about other people. It's clean, our place. It's warm and everything, but it's just a dead-end type of job.

Issues for the future

Taking seriously the injunction to see heritage as created in the present suggests seeing visiting as position-taking *practices* – enacted from a particular social standpoint in the present in which memories are remade. This seems to me more fruitful than asking how visitors decode discrete messages according to individual competencies. Examining visitors' active 'identifications' with heritage can inform understanding about how heritage intersects with people's memories, life trajectories and habitus (including relations of class, gender, age, ethnicity, generation, community and belonging). We also need to look critically at forms of display (in terms of technologies of representation, narrative, image, etc.) and their relationship to memory (in terms of lived, situated practices and social spaces). Class and politics are almost always there in the background of heritage, grand or 'ordinary', but' in the case of industrial

heritage, often submerged into stories of 'our community" where class seems absent. To attend to the presence of class, its problematic and troubling implications need to be acknowledged as impelling processes of identification *and* disidentification. Rather than suggesting that classes carry around with them similar collective stores of common memories, we need to ask *how* people's various current situations and prior dispositions create standpoints from which they may 'look back' and recognize 'how quickly it's all changed'.

Note

1. Admittedly, the London Transport Museum has collections relating to middle-class suburbia (see http://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/spotlight/suburbia), and mounted a temporary exhibition on the topic in 2010. However, my general claim that museums do not represent middle-class lives to the same extent or in the same manner as working-class or aristocratic ones still stands.

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