

most basic sense, involves the investigation of these two processes and the relationship between them. Heritage studies is an exciting new interdisciplinary field of inquiry which draws on a range of academic disciplines and skills including history, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, art history, biology, geography, textual analysis and visual discrimination, to name but a few. The aim of this book is to form an introduction to heritage as a global concept, and critical heritage studies as a field of inquiry.

## What is heritage?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘heritage’ as ‘property that is or may be inherited; an inheritance’, ‘valued things such as historic buildings that have been passed down from previous generations’, and ‘relating to things of historic or cultural value that are worthy of **preservation**’. The emphasis on inheritance and **conservation** is important here, as is the focus on ‘property’, ‘things’ or ‘buildings’. So (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, anyway), heritage is something that can be passed from one generation to the next, something that can be conserved or inherited, and something that has historic or cultural value. Heritage might be understood to be a physical ‘object’: a piece of property, a building or a place that is able to be ‘owned’ and ‘passed on’ to someone else.

In addition to these physical *objects* and *places of heritage* there are also various *practices of heritage* that are conserved or handed down from one generation to the next. Language is an important aspect of who we understand ourselves to be, and it is learned and passed from adult to child, from generation to generation. These invisible or ‘intangible’ practices of heritage, such as language, culture, popular song, literature or dress, are as important in helping us to understand who we are as the physical objects and buildings that we are more used to thinking of as ‘heritage’. Another aspect of these practices of heritage is the ways in which we go about conserving things – the choices we make about what to conserve from the past and what to discard: which memories to keep, and which to forget; which memorials to maintain, and which to allow to be demolished; which buildings to save, and which ones to allow to be built over. Practices of heritage are customs and habits which, although intangible, inform who we are as collectives, and help to create our collective social memory. We use objects of heritage (artefacts, buildings, sites, landscapes) alongside practices of heritage (languages, music, community commemorations, conservation and preservation of objects or memories from the past) to shape our ideas about our past, present and future.

Another way of thinking about this distinction between objects of heritage and practices of heritage is to consider the different perspectives through which heritage is perceived. For every object of heritage there are also heritage

practices. However one group of people (say, professional heritage managers) respond to heritage, other people may respond differently. Thus, around an object of heritage, there may be value judgements based on **'inherent' qualities** (which may indeed play a determining role in designating the object and conserving it), but there may well be other values which drive the use of the object (associations of personal or national identity, associations with history, leisure etc., as in the example of **designation of Harry S. Truman's otherwise humble dwelling as a National Historic Site** discussed later in this chapter). For every object of **tangible heritage** there is also an **intangible heritage** that 'wraps' around it – the language we use to describe it, for example, or its place in social practice or religion. Objects of heritage are embedded in an experience created by various kinds of users and the people who attempt to manage this experience. **An analogous situation exists in the art world in understanding aesthetics.** There is no art without the spectator, and what the spectator (and critic) makes of the art work sits alongside what the artist intended and what official culture designates in a discursive and often contested relationship. So in addition to the objects and practices of heritage themselves, we also need to be mindful of varying 'perspectives', or *subject positions on heritage*.

The historian and geographer **David Lowenthal** has written extensively on the important distinction between heritage and history. For many people, the word 'heritage' is probably synonymous with 'history'. However, historians have criticised the many instances of recreation of the past in the image of the present which occur in museums, historic houses and heritage sites throughout the world, and have sought to distance themselves from what they might characterise as 'bad' history. As Lowenthal points out in *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, heritage is not history at all: 'it is not an inquiry into the past, but a celebration of it ... a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes' (Lowenthal, 1997, p. x). Heritage must be seen as separate from the pursuit of history, as it is concerned with the re-packaging of the past for some purpose in the present. These purposes may be nationalistic ones, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book, or operate at the local level, for example in the case of the local Kenyan museum discussed in the case study in Chapter 7.

**'Heritage' also has a series of specific and clearly defined technical and legal meanings.** For example, the two places discussed earlier in this chapter are delineated as 'heritage' by their inclusion on the World Heritage List. As John Carman (2002, p. 22) notes, **heritage is created in a process of categorising.** These places have an official position that has a series of obligations, both legal and 'moral', arising from their inclusion on this register. As places on the World Heritage List they must be actively conserved, they should have formal documents and policies in place to determine their management, and there is an assumption that they will be able

to be visited so that their values to conservation and the world's heritage can be appreciated.

There are many other forms of official categorisation that can be applied to heritage sites at the national or state level throughout the world. Indeed, heritage as a field of practice seems to be full of lists. The impulse within heritage to categorise is an important aspect of its character. The moment a place receives official recognition as a heritage 'site', its relationship with the landscape in which it exists and with the people who use it immediately changes. It somehow becomes a place, object or practice 'outside' the everyday. It is special, and set apart from the realm of daily life. Even where places are not officially recognised as heritage, the way in which they are set apart and used in the production of **collective memory** serves to define them as heritage. For example, although it might not belong on any heritage register, a local sports arena might be the focus for collective understandings of a local community and its past, and a materialisation of local memories, hopes and dreams. At the same time, **the process of listing a site as heritage involves a series of value judgements about what is important, and hence worth conserving, and what is not. There is a dialectical relationship between the effect of listing something as heritage, and its perceived significance and importance to society.**

Some authors would define heritage (or at least 'official' heritage) as those objects, places and practices that can be formally protected using heritage laws and charters. The kinds of heritage we are most accustomed to thinking about in this category are particular kinds of objects, buildings, towns and landscapes. **One common way of classifying heritage is to distinguish between 'cultural' heritage (those things manufactured by humans), and 'natural' heritage (those which have not been manufactured by humans).** While this seems like a fairly clear-cut distinction, it immediately throws up a series of problems in distinguishing the 'social' values of the natural world. Returning to the example of the Great Barrier Reef discussed earlier in this chapter, for the Indigenous Australians whose traditional country encompasses the reef and islands, the natural world is created and maintained by 'cultural' activities and ceremonies involving some aspects of intangible action such as song and dance, and other more practical activities such as controlled burning of the landscape and sustainable hunting and fishing practices. It would obviously be extremely difficult to characterise these values of the natural landscapes to Indigenous Australians using a system that divides 'cultural' and 'natural' heritage and sees the values of natural landscapes as being primarily ecological.

**Heritage is in fact a very difficult concept to define.** Most people will have an idea of what heritage 'is', and what kinds of thing could be described using the term heritage. Most people, too, would recognise the existence of an official heritage that could be opposed to their own personal or collective one. For

example, many would have visited a national museum in the country in which they live but would recognise that the artefacts contained within it do not describe entirely what they would understand as their own history and heritage (see also Chapters 6 and 7). **Clearly, any attempt to create an official heritage is necessarily both partial and selective.** This gap between, on one hand, what an individual understands to be their heritage and, on the other hand, the official heritage promoted and managed by the state introduces the possibility of multiple ‘heritages’. It has been suggested earlier that heritage could be understood to encompass objects, places and practices that have some significance in the present which relates to the past.

In 2002 during the United Nations year for **cultural heritage**, UNESCO produced a list of ‘types’ of cultural heritage (UNESCO, n.d.). This is one way of dividing and categorising the many types of object, place and practice to which people attribute heritage value. It should not be considered an exhaustive list, but it gives a sense of the diversity of ‘things’ that might be considered to be official heritage:

- cultural heritage sites (including archaeological sites, ruins, historic buildings)
- historic cities (urban landscapes and their constituent parts as well as ruined cities)
- **cultural landscapes** (including parks, gardens and other ‘modified’ landscapes such as pastoral lands and farms)
- natural **sacred sites** (places that people revere or hold important but that have no evidence of human modification, for example sacred mountains)
- underwater cultural heritage (for example shipwrecks)
- museums (including cultural museums, art galleries and house museums)
- movable cultural heritage (objects as diverse as paintings, tractors, stone tools and cameras – this category covers any form of object that is movable and that is outside of an archaeological context)
- handicrafts
- documentary and digital heritage (the **archives** and objects deposited in libraries, including digital archives)
- cinematographic heritage (movies and the ideas they convey)
- **oral traditions** (stories, histories and traditions that are not written but passed from generation to generation)
- languages
- festive events (festivals and carnivals and the traditions they embody)
- rites and beliefs (rituals, traditions and religious beliefs)
- music and song

- the performing arts (theatre, drama, dance and music)
- traditional medicine
- literature
- culinary traditions
- traditional sports and games.

Some of the types of heritage are objects and places ('physical' or 'material' heritage) while others are practices ('intangible' heritage). However, many of these categories cross both types of heritage. For example, ritual practices might involve incantations (intangible) as well as ritual objects (physical). So we should be careful of thinking of these categories as clear cut or distinct. In addition, this list only includes 'cultural' heritage. **Natural heritage is most often thought about in terms of landscapes and ecological systems, but it is comprised of features such as plants, animals, natural landscapes and landforms, oceans and water bodies.** Natural heritage is valued for its aesthetic qualities, its contribution to ecological, biological and geological processes and its provision of natural habitats for the conservation of biodiversity. In the same way that we perceive both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage, we could also speak of the tangible aspects of natural heritage (the plants, animals and landforms) alongside the intangible (its aesthetic qualities and its contribution to biodiversity).

Another aspect of heritage is the idea that things tend to be classified as 'heritage' only in the light of some risk of losing them. The element of potential or real threat to heritage – of destruction, loss or decay – links heritage historically and politically with the conservation movement. Even where a building or object is under no immediate threat of destruction, its listing on a heritage register is an action which assumes a potential threat at some time in the future, from which it is being protected by legislation or listing. The connection between heritage and threat will become more important in the later part of this chapter.

**Heritage is a term that is also quite often used to describe a set of values, or principles, which relate to the past.** So, for example, it is possible for a firm of estate agents to use the term in its name not only to mean that it markets and sells 'heritage' properties, but also simultaneously to invoke a series of meanings about traditional values which are seen as desirable in buying and selling properties. We can also think here about the values which are implicit in making decisions about what to conserve and what not to conserve, in the choices we make about what we decide to label 'heritage' and what view as simply 'old' or 'outdated'. These values are implicit in cultural heritage management.