The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains


This study, Martin Thomas announces, does not sit comfortably within a disciplinary niche. He is right – that is its fascination. Beneath the interpretations of paintings, diaries, profiles and its happenings, lies the pain of colonisation, dispossession and the dangerous mythologising of the Other. It is a meditative work – and its musings deepen our understanding of the term ‘cultural landscape’ as land that is laden with human associations and, occasionally, inspiration.

We are introduced to the Blue Mountains as a barrier rising between Sydney’s plains and its hinterland. Its provocative profile hovers above the horizon, waiting to be surveyed. The following exploration of human responses to the place over time, allows Thomas to evolve his own scholarly ‘imagining’ of meanings. He overlays a series of perceptions, deliberately mixing intuition, legend and science to acknowledge both the sublime and the abyss.

I have just struggled back, breathless and scratched, from Victoria Falls to write this review. Through the tumble-walled valley shimmering with eucalypt, melaleuca and piping belbird, I am witness to those qualities, but Martin Thomas seeks greater depth than that. He offers moments of pure poetry, in the search for a ‘collective mode of singing this country’.

Let us consider the structure of the book. There are five formally shaped Passages, each of which makes its own revelations: ‘The False Horizon’; ‘Shades of Blue’; ‘Into the Labyrinth’; ‘The Echo and the Sound Itself’; ‘Vera Gordon Childe and the Abyss of Time’. In opening passage one, Thomas asks: How to draw a history out of dreams? And then he offers links between the passages. Too many for me. There are the Introduction and the Coda of course, but also preludes and explanatory interludes. The many different stories do not require such individual justification. Each performs its own didactic purpose, even on the question of suicide, and if the links are not apparent then the labyrinth will be. The writing is valid as a collection of thoughts. Personal, academically informed thoughts. Here are some.

Through various perceptions of landscape, Thomas depicts the marauding coloniser grappling with the Other. He sees the poignancy of a labyrinth on the edge of a penal colony, whispering to convicts of potential freedoms on the other side. He notes ‘the sharp juxtaposition of marks of presence and conditions of absence’. He explains that ‘all evidence of anxieties about immortality were scripted according to racial suppositions. A pervasive and unacknowledged trait of Australian culture: that Aborigines have long represented to Europeans the face of death within the landscape’. He claims ‘How easy it is to succumb to the spell of the cartographer, who does not make the world real but simply imposes a realist fantasy’ and that ‘the transfer of a maritime imagery to the Australian continent had social consequences of considerable gravity’. These are thoughts worth having.

The tone of writing is occasionally overly abstract. In musing on ambiguities: ‘the disjunctions and ruptures that will frustrate, though ultimately modulate, any attempt to find communion with the spirit of this place’. The reviewer-poet, Mark Tredinnick, agrees on this one criticism. While praising the lyricism of the book and Thomas’ loving recording of Blue Mountains folklore, he also captures that limitation: ‘Thomas is inclined to see a landscape as a work of the mind more than a work of nature... He walks hobbled by theory. His intellectual baggage clings in his backpack. To walk with him is to remain distanced by that noise’ (Bulletin 122/4).

Nonetheless, the book is so imaginatively conceived and richly illustrated that Mark Tredinnick and I are certainly not alone in enjoying it. It won the Gleeebooks Prize for Literary and Cultural Criticism in the 2004 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards and was short-listed for both the Non-Fiction and Innovation in Writing awards in the 2004 Festival Awards for Literature. Its author is an Australian historian, writer, biographer, radio producer and resident of those so-called mountains. His professional attributes are apparent in the book. Read it.

Joan Domicelj

Interpreting the Land Down Under: Heritage Interpretation and Tour Guiding


They say Australians are a nation of keen punters and I believe it would be safe to bet that there will be several ‘aha!’ moments in this book for all who seek to interpret cultural heritage. Interpreting the Land Down Under is the fifth in a series on interpretation and environmental communication by the American publisher Fulcrum. Its focus is contemporary research into aspects of heritage interpretation, cultural tourism and tour guiding. Rosemary Black and Betty Weiler, the knowledgeable and inquiring editors of this anthology, have drawn together research on a variety of interpretive processes and media that serve to illuminate the thought processes that go into the development of heritage interpretation practice in Australia. Black and Weiler showcase their own experience and deep interest in the complexities of interpretive tour guiding. Black draws on her doctoral thesis to discuss the pros and cons of tour guide certification for ecotourism industry stakeholders: a hot topic this year as industry stakeholders and the Commonwealth government join forces to develop a National Tour Guide Accreditation Framework. Black and Weiler collaborate on a chapter about the relevance and accessibility of interpretive guide training providing insights into the ever-changing training environment including TAFE and university programs. A further chapter sees Weiler collaborate with Kate Armstrong on a revealing chapter: “They said what to whom?!”. Messages delivered on guided tours in Victorian...
protected areas.' It highlights a worrying disparity in message delivery by a variety of guides across a range of heritage sites.

Other research described in the book provides further insight into aspects of tour guiding. Xin Yu outlines the challenges faced by guides offering language and cultural interpretation to in-bound Chinese tourists. In her paper, 'Chinese tour guiding in Australia', Yu makes a good case for a range of necessary improvements to current practice and outlines areas requiring further research. Another interesting excursion into a relatively new area is 'Kangaroo or gangurr? Indigenous wildlife interpretation in Australia' in which authors Zeppel, Muloin and Higginbotham evaluate face-to-face and static methods for their effectiveness in interpreting complex cultural connections between Indigenous Australians and indigenous wildlife, and in the process provide a concise set of guidelines.

Lisa De Santis' paper provided me with several 'aha' moments. Her 'Once upon a time ... interpreting the past for young children' describes and compares approaches to interpretation for an audience of four to eight year olds. Describing the usual practice in two small house museums, the paper is concise and engaging (like good interpretation) and it too provides clear recommendations for good practice. A paper on Strahan Visitor Centre by Liza Fallon and Lorne Knwocken, provides exacting research into the effectiveness of such centres, with plenty of statistics and figures to back up their conclusions. It would be interesting to investigate the changes in the centre since the initial research was undertaken. This paper raises perhaps more questions than it answers ... plenty of work for the inquiring minds of the future. Warwick Frost, in his 'A Pile of Rocks and a Hole in the Ground. Heritage tourism and interpretation of the gold rushes at the Mount Alexander Diggings', presents findings on the effect of one very dominant visitor node, the successful Sovereign Hill, on the visitation and interpretation of another small, but significant, gold rush location.

Three more papers complete the book, each investigating the effectiveness of the written word. Jeremy Robertson and Jane James look into the best ways to interpret the complex cultural heritage of geological and evolutionary sites to vastly different audiences. Their study, 'Layers of Meaning: Interpretation for the novice and the expert at the Naracoorte World Heritage Site', focuses on the extraordinary fossil caves in South Australia. Elizabeth Beckmann, in her 'Listening between the lines: Using research-based knowledge to support the development of interpretive text' clearly articulates the exhaustive but beneficial processes necessary to form understandable minimal impact messages for the Australian Alps national parks. The paper reminds us how crucial formative evaluation is for all heritage interpretation. Finally, and slightly from left field, is a paper from Russell Staff and Robyn Bushell comparing approaches to cultural interpretation and information presentation in a variety of proprietary travel guides. Their 'Travel Knowledgeably: The question of content in heritage interpretation' is fascinating for its discussion on the application of diverse social and cultural values to the making of (multiple) meanings.

We can all use reminders on how to actively and precisely target interpretive media, whether face-to-face guiding or non-personal media. This collection of papers brings many issues into the spotlight and it identifies many questions worthy of further research.

Cath Renwick

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**Sense of Place: Senses of Time**


The editors' aim for this collection of 16 papers is to examine the relationship between place and time as they are related through the medium of heritage. Most are case studies, linked by an introduction and concluding paper. The collection is divided into three themes: Creating Senses of Place from Senses of Time; The Public/Official Creation of Place Identities and Insiders and Outsiders. With each theme comes an introduction by the editors.

The biggest hurdle in relating to this volume is the editorial voice, which is written in standard academic post-modern English. As such, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what they are getting at in their introduction, beyond a bit of self-promotion (see p.5). In the post-Fordist capitalist society that I live in, time is limited and, frankly, I cannot see anyone bothering to spend the time to find out just what the editors mean when there are other things to do with our lives. Post-modern is just so post.

Fortunately, the case studies are of greater interest for the different perspectives they bring to the underlying themes of the collection. Generally, these are interesting as they are from unfamiliar localities and bring diverse perspectives to their topics. McMullan's paper 'Exploring the Irish Mumming Tradition with GIS' certainly has the most intriguing title in the collection, one that combines the ancient with the modern.

The first section looks at the creation of places and the creation of the identity of places through the medium of heritage. Two papers cover landscapes in the Netherlands, two focus on aspects of Ireland, plus the aforementioned mumming item. The latter's topic and title are enticing; however, the paper is more a description of a project rather than its results. A similar paper, 'Mapping Meanings in the Cultural Landscape', by Whelan, actually discusses ways meaning could be mapped in an urban cultural landscape using Dublin as an example. This piece will be of interest to those who see cultural landscapes as essentially rural rather than urban.

The second section discusses the deliberate creation of place-identities and why it is done, focusing on 'official' creations of place. Four papers are presented in this section. Van der Aa's paper on 'World Heritage as a Moans of Marking Mexican Identity' is of interest in the context of Australia's World Heritage efforts. This paper discusses the complex processes in establishing a Mexican identity and the process in putting forward places for the World Heritage list, which gives cause to reflect on Australia's own efforts in this regard. There are two related papers, one by Miller on 'Irish Regimental Heritage' and the other by Switzer on 'Conflict Commemoration amongst Protestants in Northern Ireland'. 'They cover similar ground: formal commemoration, informal commemoration and the creation of identity. The challenge, as Switzer points out, is how to commemorate in a politically charged atmosphere where conflicting meanings are ascribed to the acts of commemoration.

The final section considers 'consumer' creation of places. Five papers discuss the familiar process of creating places in the artistic media. The most interesting of these papers is that of Ashworth, 'Imagining Newfoundland.' It is an interesting and lucid discussion on Newfoundland and its conflicting identities
as expressed through heritage, leading to the stark conclusion that ‘Newfoundland as a whole has become a replica of a replica.’ Other papers discuss the media creation of rural identity, and identify creation through literature and artists. This is a familiar tale for all involved in Australian heritage: from Ramsey Street to Hill End, there is a similar range of experiences.

Overall, this book has much to offer to Australian heritage practitioners in terms of interesting case studies and the opportunity to use these to reflect on the Australian experience and our role in it.

Iain Stuart

Ireland’s Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity

Ireland’s Heritages is based on papers from a 2002 conference. The authors summarise recent professional writing on the perpetual themes of memory and identity in the construction and utilisation of (particularly national) cultural heritages. Unsurprisingly, they use Irish examples to further explore these themes within their own critical perspectives. But they reflect current heritage debates worldwide.

The first theme of the collection is ‘Commemoration and the Politics of Heritage’ in the past and in the present. Here, papers illustrate how memory impinges on the individual and collective consciousness. Much reference is made to David Lowenthal’s ubiquitous and magisterial The Past is a Foreign Country. Examples of commemoration are offered of events as recent as the attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001.

The power of memory is discussed as shaping significant elements of the present in Ireland, where chronicles of rebellion and war impact strongly on present day attitudes and practices. Acts of remembrance, particularly of the struggle for independence, are now important dates in Ireland’s calendar. In fact, memorials seem as central to Irish life as churches and pubs. This tradition of commemoration of political events, is obviously crucial to Irish cultural heritage, but was, until the recent dramatic attack on democracy, less important in America, and is a relatively small component of Australian heritage.

The second theme is ‘Spaces of Individual and Collective Memory’. In ‘Landscape and Memory’ Simon Schama demonstrates how inherited landscape myths and memories share ‘their surprising endurance through the centuries and their power to shape institutions that we still live with’. The management of these sites is now largely by government bodies such as the Heritage Council, established in 1995. Recognition of the notion of heritage as a historically contingent cultural process, rather than a physical object, critically impacts on interpretation. This stresses the eternal conundrum of understanding heritage within the context of the present: that heritage only has significance in the here and now and therefore reflects our present society as well as our desires for the future.

The third theme is ‘Heritage, Economy and Constructs of Identity’. It is argued that debate on the commodification of the past is essential in appreciating how the economic uses of and claims on heritage impinge on constructs of memory and identity. Fairly recent changes in investment and financial incentives assisted Irish society and popular culture to move from traditional insularity and conservatism to a more outward looking, materialistic and liberal perspective. Globalisation and the genealogy industry enable greater access for more people to Ireland’s heritage, both to the physical country and to peoples’ own heritage, the public and the private.

The central role that museums play in the construction of national discourses is analysed. Coinciding with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century, museums became symbols of collective social memory, a space where the nation could present itself. Museums continue to have a role in celebrating national identity and community-led definitions of identity, which are superseding those of the state. Of concern here is the tendency to overlook the inherently political nature of museums.

Ireland’s Heritages is of interest for its exploration of the role of emotional subjectivity in the making of history, particularly in the question of its relationship to physical Ireland, and the perception of external and internal influences on the making of history. We know that history is written by the victors, but there are also memories of the vanquished and in recent social history, these are sometimes viewed as more important.

Maura Cronin’s ‘Remembering the Creameries’ resonates as an apt example of the use of documentary and oral histories to remember and celebrate dairies’ roles and workers, pivotal to Irish daily life for a century. The contrast between nostalgia and reality is a universal theme in reconstructing history. It is summed up well by the County Clare Creamery manager who said, ‘I don’t think anybody would like to go back to the back-breaking things. I suppose it’s easy to be nostalgic. The reality is that it was tough work...I don’t think that people who have moved on would go back to the old way’ (p.183).

Don’t be put off by the busy images or the trench-mud colour of the book’s front cover. Ireland’s Heritages is a useful reference in its summary of debate on memory and identity, and in its challenging task of bringing these themes into a critical forum. It has applications for Australia – which itself might be placed among Ireland’s cultural heritages.

Suzanne Bravery

Management of Interpretive Sites: Developing Sustainable Operations through Effective Leadership

This book seems to be intended as a resource for people undertaking training courses leading to the USA’s National Association of Interpretation (NAI) accreditation as Certified Interpretive Manager. Similarly, Personal Interpretation: Connecting your Audience to Heritage Resources, by the same authors, supports the Certified Interpretive Guide course. As a stand-alone text, Management of Interpretive Sites fall short of the high standard of Personal Interpretation. However, even though it reads at times like a catalogue, Management of Interpretive Sites is a repository of valuable information not conveniently available elsewhere.
Evie Kirkwood’s foreword identifies the audience as those who ‘wake up … to discover you are no longer a field interpreter … [but] an interpretive manager and … interpreting seems very far away’. Of course for ‘interpreter’ one could substitute teacher, scientist, doctor or jeans-salesman. For those moving into management roles, getting relevant management training is a ubiquitous issue. Having a professional association involved in training should help develop managers who know their field of expertise well and remain connected.

Physicist Richard Feynman described the management role as where a person ‘issues instructions to other persons [where the person] has no understanding whatsoever of what he is instructing’. This elegantly encapsulates the managerialist philosophy, widely-held in recent decades, that a good manager can manage anything. In contrast, the strongest chapters of Management of Interpretive Sites are those that are interpretation-specific. The implicit anti-managerialist message is backed up with the specific injunction that one essential task of interpretation managers is to interpret interpretation to their managers. However, in spite of this injunction, Management of Interpretive Sites is not an interpretive style of book. Greater use of diagrams to explain links between aspects of management might help.

Management of Interpretive Sites aims to ‘provide a starting place for new managers and a review ... for experienced managers’. The chapters cover planning, personnel and time management, program development, marketing, policies and procedures, operations, memorabilia, professional recognition, creating culture and membership development. However, the book doesn’t really provide a ‘map’ for a new manager. Reading the foreword and then jumping straight to the concluding chapter may help motivate the reader, but a map is still lacking. An appreciation of where each chapter is going is best gained by reading the concluding paragraphs first.

Comprehensiveness becomes the most significant weakness. In trying to address the needs of an audience ranging from employees of the US National Park Service to sole managers of a small museum, too much of the advice is detached from context. The strongest chapters are the ones most directly linked to interpretation practice.

At times, the level of coverage is uneven. The authors offer the detailed explanation that a ‘fire of credit’ is an open loan account with an upper limit, but almost totally neglect the more serious issues of occupational health and safety. At a few points one asks: who needs this? For accounting systems, large organisations will have specialist units and small organisations will contract it out. For the latter, advice on how to contract appropriate professionals would seem to be more valuable than describing double-entry book-keeping (poorly). The sources for other material are limited. The authors advise the reader to explore but refrain from noting what they have found useful.

Although US-oriented, much of the book is applicable anywhere. The nearest local comparison is Heritage Management in Australia and New Zealand (ed. M. Hall and S. McArthur 1996) where seven chapters cover some of the interpretation-specific aspects of management.

For this book, the subtitle Developing Sustainable Operations through Effective Leadership seems inappropriate: ‘sustainable operations’ is just a pious hope, seen as arising from good process. The section on ‘leadership’ is a list of (name-dropping) quotes with little analytic comment. However, much of the book is about producing connected managers, unlike those described by Feynman. The real message about sustainability is found in the preface to Personal Interpretation: ‘Interpretation must add value to achieving the mission of the organisation’.

This handy-sized (A5), 110 page book can help managers of interpretive sites achieve this.

In summary, Management of Interpretive Sites is a useful resource and, at around $US20, refreshingly affordable.

Pam Enting

Fire Safety Management in Heritage Buildings


Initiated by the loss of historic buildings to the effects of fire, this technical advice note (in a slim but substantial volume of 101 pages) covers the full breadth of issues related to the topic. It includes principles of managing fire safety; fire safety structure; fire risk assessment; fire protection of buildings; staff training; damage limitation; fire and rescue services operations in historic buildings and fire safety and special considerations.

The stated aim is to provide accessible guidance for building owners and managers to enable safeguards to be implemented and to assist fire and rescue officers to better understand the unique problems implicit in the protection of historic buildings. It is interesting to note author Stewart Kidd’s observation that historic buildings are especially vulnerable to fire risk when contractors are on site.

References to statutory requirements are to Scottish standards, which make this detail less relevant to Australian situations, guided by the Building Code of Australia and Australian Standards. However the principles of fire management equally apply in Australia especially as alternative fire solutions are accepted by the building regulators throughout Australia. Australian owners would benefit from a ‘fire safety policy’ and fire risk assessment especially for any historic structures which are mainly being preserved and maintained. These policies are sometimes overlooked because they are usually generated from more active restoration and adaptation work. The detail in the technical note extends to private residences, which is an area not usually referred to in other publications; it includes appropriate practical guidance.

The other real value of this technical note is a discussion of risks during construction works. Kidd strongly recommends against ‘hot work’ such as welding, cutting, grinding and direct application of heat. In the discussion of fire protection the detail is comprehensive and extends to less used techniques such as water mist, foam and gas systems, thereby offering a full range of options for consideration. Practical advice on staff training sets out details to suit all staff, the training required; frequency plus a range of other issues to include. Another topic rarely included in information on fire protection especially for historic buildings is damage limitation, ie preparing for and planning to deal with the consequences of fires or other untoward incidents. This discusses priorities for contents and a ‘snatch list’ of contents on a room by room basis.
The emphasis on training exercises is strongly made, as a plan on paper is less effective than practicing its implementation. The detail reviews which items to move, who will move them, how they will be moved and where they will be taken in the case of a fire. Also included are actions to take immediately after the fire, including managing the media.

The detail for fire and rescue operators is quite illuminating – certainly an unusual feature. This covers disaster limitation to ensure no over-zealous demolition occurs. It also presents ways to limit damage to fabric and contents, liaison with emergency services by having information at hand to assist the fire fighters such as plans, details of services, sources of water and the like.

I was particularly taken by a section on consideration of people with disabilities, as even the current Building Code of Australia fails to adequately address this issue, even in new buildings. This extends to the full range of disabilities such as mental, vision, hearing and mobility impairment. It also includes both staff and visitors, plus both museum-type historic places and actively used heritage places such as a hotel in a heritage building.

Another topic detailed is the measures to take during special events and functions and the need to consider all aspects even down to the material in temporary seating so it does not create an additional hazard. The placement of temporary structures needs to be considered to minimise risk.

The bibliography, useful addresses and legislative detail is, of course, British-based (an Australian equivalent as an attachment to the technical note would add an extra dimension to its usefulness in Australia). The appendices include a case study of Lanhydrock House, a detailed list of supplies for disaster recovery and damage limitation, a draft fire safety policy, sample hot work permit, and advice on post-fire structural stability, all of which add an extra dimension to the practicality of the technical note. The publication has a number of illustrations of the effects of fire and examples of how fire protection measures have been successfully incorporated. More examples would have been beneficial.

Fire Safety Management in Heritage Buildings is extremely comprehensive and although a technical note, is easily read and understood. Details and information are presented in clear terms, making it useful for owners, operators of heritage places from a small private cottage to large public buildings, as well as professional conservation practitioners. It achieves the objective of an accessible and practical guide to many of the fire safety problems facing those associated with heritage places.

I would commend Fire Safety Management in Heritage Buildings as an essential text to have and to use.

Eric Martin