

INTRODUCTION

Reframing heritage in a participatory culture

Elisa Giaccardi

Heritage and Social Media explores how social media reframe our understanding and experience of heritage by opening up more participatory ways of interacting with heritage objects and concerns. Through the idea of 'participatory culture' the book begins to explore how social media can be brought to bear on the encounter with heritage and on the socially produced meanings and values that individuals and communities ascribe to it.

Ubiquitous personal memory devices and social media technologies (e.g. multimedia recorders, camera phones, online media sharing and social networking sites) are giving rise to a new age of information and communication technologies characterized by participatory and grassroots activities. The impact on heritage discourse and practice is significant, as new digital technologies alter and transform the complex set of social practices that interweave memories, material traces and performative enactments to give meaning and significance in the present to the lived realities of our past. Yet this is among the first scholarly publications that critically address the profound and transformative impact of social media on our understanding and experience of heritage.

New heritage frontiers

From private memorabilia and scrapbooks to family inheritance and traditions, from the collective storytelling of historical events to the performative reification of a living connection to land – heritage is today about far more than museum artifacts and historic buildings, and how they are to be preserved and communicated. It is about making sense of our memories and developing a sense of identity through shared and repeated interactions with the tangible remains and lived traces of a common past.

Like the farmers of the Norwegian Jæren landscape – which as described by Setten (2005) have measured their own farming against those of other family members as

well as present and past farmers in their local community – we live and practice heritage within situations that are ‘personal and yet social, private and yet public, of the present and yet of the past and the future’ (Setten 2005: 74). In other words, we socially construct heritage in the context of our own lives and imaginations to interact meaningfully with our past and shape our vision of the future (Thomas 2004; Lowenthal 2005). This fundamental understanding emphasizes that heritage meanings and values are not attached to artifacts, buildings or sites. Neither are they frozen in time. They are the results of repeated and ongoing interactions in the lived world of ordinary people (Byrne 2008).

Changes in the definition and management of heritage are prefigured in the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Council of Europe 2005). Setting the broader understandings of heritage that have been emerging over the last decades into a wider social, political and economic context, the Faro Convention proposes a more comprehensive and holistic view of what should be intended as cultural heritage, and emphasizes the importance of people’s participation and engagement – rights as well as responsibilities – in the making of place and local identities. New scales and new frontiers are prefigured for heritage practice, which set no boundaries or limits to what heritage can be and how is to be intended. At the core is a definition of heritage practice that focuses not just on the protection of the material and temporal fabric of heritage but more importantly on ‘the management of change’ (Fairclough 2009): the use of heritage in a broader cultural, political and social context to express and perform ‘constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions’ (Council of Europe 2005, from Art. 2). Such a definition voids of meaning distinctions between tangible and intangible heritage, between conventional heritage and ‘new heritage’ (i.e. digitally born forms of heritage), and between prospective logics of ‘future heritage’ (i.e. what we may value in the future) as opposed to retrospective logics of preserving what of value we have inherited from the past.

Today mobile and ubiquitous technologies are accelerating these changes by enabling users to participate, spontaneously and continuously, in activities of collection, preservation and interpretation of digitized heritage content and new digitally mediated forms of heritage practice. Heritage institutions and practitioners are urged to use emerging information and communication technologies – in particular social media – to encourage visitors to actively interact with heritage content and connect socially with one another (Simon 2010). Yet little emphasis is given to people’s autonomous engagement with cultural heritage in the context of their own lives and in association with the unique character of the places and communities in which heritage comes to matter. In other words, there is little understanding of how emerging technologies are powerfully connecting heritage experience to people’s lives and settings. Even though increasing attention is being paid to the construction of personally and socially meaningful experiences, issues of heritage value and its wider social significance have not yet been placed at the core of the design, management and renewal of heritage experience (Giaccardi, 2011).

The rise of the participatory culture

This book examines the impact of ubiquitous personal memory devices and social media technologies on heritage discourse and practice through the idea of participatory culture. But what is a participatory culture? According to Jenkins *et al.* (2006), a participatory culture is one in which ‘not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued’ (Jenkins *et al.* 2006: 7). This culture is characterized by relatively low barriers to public artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations with others, and frameworks for formal and informal mentorship to novices. In such a culture, people feel socially connected with one another, all the time (Shirky 2008). Even though acting at different levels of motivation and expertise, they belong to communities that provide, according to Jenkins *et al.*, ‘strong incentives for creative expression and active participation’ (Jenkins *et al.* 2006: 7). Participatory culture or in the plural, cultures of participation (Fischer 2011) value the creative process and how engaging socially in creative activities changes how we think about the others and ourselves. As emphasized in Jenkins, a participatory culture is one that shifts the focus from individual expression to community involvement, and reframes literacy from matters of interactive technology to issues of cultural attitude. Participatory culture is not just about producing and consuming user-generated content; it is also manifested through diverse forms of affiliation, expression, collaboration, and distribution (Jenkins *et al.* 2006).

Participatory cultures are not new. For example, amateur cultures are an instance of participatory culture. In addition to the numerous historical societies, preservation societies and literary societies that could be mentioned here, the Amateur Press Association of the middle of the nineteenth century is perhaps one of the most widely known historical examples. However, we are witnessing today a broader and more profound phenomenon. This is the result of a combination of several socio-technical factors. Creating, publishing and distributing content requires less time and less money today than in the past. Software that does not require sophisticated programming skills is available and easy to use. With Web 2.0 (O’Reilly 2005) and the spreading of web applications and services that facilitate online information sharing and collaboration, there is not even the need for additional software to be installed on the computer. All can be done online, quite naturally. From encyclopedic collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia) to question-and-answer websites (e.g. Quora), from non-profit crowdsourcing projects (e.g. Ushahidi for microblogging) to crowdsourcing projects where people are paid for taking on open tasks (e.g. Amazon Mechanical Turk) or competing in open contests (e.g. Userfarm), from do-it-yourself (DIY) websites where people share knowledge and tips on how to make things (e.g. Instructables) to web services for the sharing and tagging of a large variety of digital content (e.g. Flickr for photos, YouTube for videos, SoundCloud for sounds, Google 3D Warehouse for 3D models, including even Wikileaks for whistle-blowing), from social tagging (e.g.

Delicious or StumbleUpon) to collaborative web mapping (e.g. OpenStreetMap, an editable geographical map that is also a wiki and a crowdsourcing project)... the list of services and websites supporting the production and distribution of digital content has no end. This production and distribution is facilitated by social networking, that is, the way in which social media (which builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0) fosters the emergence of online communities around affinities and topics of interest, transforming traditional one-way media communication into an active conversation. From generalist social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) to specialized networks (e.g. LinkedIn), from custom social networks (e.g. Ning) to microblogging services (e.g. Twitter), people aggregate and engage in conversation in many and various ways.

Additionally, with the spread of iPhone, Android and BlackBerry smartphones, which combine the functions of a mobile phone with that of a small personal computer, and with other high-end mobile devices such as Apple iPod Touch and iPad, or Amazon Kindle (just to name the most well known today), social media are increasingly becoming mobile. They are contributing to new mindsets and skill sets, fostering a culture of participation unrestricted by schedules and locations. This mobility promotes a continual activity of interaction in which we are immersed and involved, all the time (Greenfield 2006). Moreover, there is now the possibility of attaching digital data to artifacts in the real world through social media suites for augmented reality, the tagging of uniquely identifiable objects, or the sensing of patterns of activity and specific behaviors around those artifacts (Ashton 2009). Thus the fabric of participation and conversation offered by social media is not simply made of online interactions and virtual experiences; it is also interwoven with physical objects, places and activities that are augmented and enhanced with social data and connectivity. From the cloud of networked web infrastructures, services and data to the real world (and back again), the participatory culture is radically changing the rules of the game.

Implications

The idea of participatory culture is challenging and in some cases recasting the way in which industries do business, citizens engage in civic and political life, teachers and students prepare and learn, and people engage in forms of creative expression and new craftsmanship. The long-term implications of this change are impossible to know, but they raise significant issues. In this more plural and collaborative culture, 'the boundaries between amateur and professional, consumer and producer, grassroots and mainstream are breached, if not erased' (Leadbeater 2010: 46). The impact of social media and emerging cultures of participation on our understanding and experience of heritage is blurring. This leads to a questioning of the boundaries between official and unofficial heritage, reshaping and creating new relations between audiences and institutions, fostering grassroots understandings and manifestations of heritage practice, and in general bringing to the front the living and performative aspects of heritage as part of our present-day existence.

The way in which we capture our living experiences, the nature of our artifacts, and the ways in which we share them are changing (Giaccardi *et al.* 2012). Aspects of our lives are increasingly captured and shared with others who can themselves annotate and augment these digital traces with their own perspectives. Preserving, making sense and exchanging everyday artifacts and practices is increasingly becoming a matter of heritage: it brings the past to matter in the present, helping us to tell stories about who we are. In this sense, heritage artifacts and practices not only constitute a legacy to future generations, but they also play a crucial role in shaping our sense of place and identity: ‘Heritage begins with you as an individual and grows all the way to the whole world’ (LeBlanc 1993).

What we see emerging is not simply an opportunity to widen the visitor experience from personal to communal interactions; it is an unstable, fluid shift in our understanding of what is at the core of heritage experience and why it is important. If we acknowledge this challenge, then it becomes clear that we cannot widen the margin of how people participate (though diversely) in the social significance of heritage artifacts and places, unless we begin to understand how we experience and construct heritage as a result of the emerging technologies and social practices that are shaping and being shaped by the spreading of participatory cultures and attitudes, in an upward spiral of possibilities and expectations. Social media is giving people a more central position, creating networked meanings and even more importantly contexts that are subject to rapid change and renegotiation (Van Oost 2012). In other words, social media create infrastructures of communication and interaction that act as places of cultural production and lasting values at the service of what could be viewed as a new generation of ‘living’ heritage practices. This is a critical and fundamental consideration that goes beyond learning how to use social media effectively. It urges heritage professionals and designers to address thoughtfully the new series of issues that come with social media, including the loss of curatorial voice and the challenges of multivocality, the redistribution of curatorial activities and the fluid ‘coming together’ of heritage narratives, the duty of memory and the limits of the social syntax of mainstream social media, the digital (un)sustainability of embodied practices and knowledges, and the ways in which participation and dialogue are configured – just to name the issues most frequently discussed in this collection.

About the book

The book explores from different perspectives the idea that heritage is defined more by the cultural work of ordinary people than by official heritage lists, as discussed in Susie West’s *Understanding Heritage in Practice* and Laurajane Smith’s *Uses of Heritage*. This idea is also emphasized by heritage scholars such as Rodney Harrison, David Byrne and Graham Fairclough, who look at heritage as a form of social action. Referring to these ideas and to emerging notions of technology as experience (as advocated by Peter Wright and John McCarthy in *Technology as Experience*), *Heritage and Social Media* expands current ideas of ‘digital heritage’ and ‘new heritage’ to

investigate the radical impact of social media on our understanding and experience of heritage. In doing so, the book moves beyond traditional museological concerns and presents unconventional heritage ideas and experiences ranging from bottom-up forms of participatory curation in the museum (see Iversen and Smith, this volume) to everyday grassroots practices unique to social media (see Liu, this volume). The book also moves beyond an account of the opportunities and challenges of using emerging technologies in the conventional museological activities of collection, interpretation and exhibition, as it examines the broader landscape of social interaction with material artifacts and environmental settings that is opened up by mobile and ubiquitous social technologies ‘in the wild’.

Heritage and Social Media highlights the complexities of heritage discourse and practice in the context of the participatory culture shaped by social media. The book accounts empirically for socio-cultural issues of archiving and representing ‘digital stuff’, and critically speaks to how experiences, memories and identities are constructed, valued and passed on in a society in which people come together to generate, organize and share content through an ongoing interchange of thoughts and affects, opinions and beliefs, attachments and antipathies.

In filling a significant gap in the available heritage literature, this book represents a significant cross section of ideas and practices associated with the use of social media for heritage-related purposes. The book also offers important material for designers and technologists in the emerging field of cultural informatics, and provides conceptual resources for future research in the field. The contributors to this volume come from a wide array of disciplines, including heritage studies, anthropology, museology, archaeology, history, human geography, sociology, architecture, computer science, interaction design, digital media and human-computer interaction.

Themes and chapters

To highlight the specific changes produced by social media, the book is structured around three major themes: social practice, public formation and sense of place. Each section contains four chapters: the first three chapters address issues of heritage, social media and participatory culture within a broader context; the fourth chapter is more specific to the museum sector and related issues of institutional change.

Social practice

New ways of understanding and experiencing heritage are emerging as a result of novel social practices of collection, representation and communication that are enabled and promoted by social media. A renewed legitimacy of personal accounts and community-based practices are capturing the dialectical and often conflicted relations between people and their environment. Collective memories (see Silberman and Purser, this volume), digital memorials (see Pitsillides, Jefferies and Conreen, this volume), and grassroots curatorial practices (see Liu, this volume) are just a few examples of how social media are giving new meaning to notions

such as public heritage and curation. What categories of cultural objects do social media enable us to capture, and what forms of curation do they support? How do these heterogeneous 'social traces' (see Ciolfi, this volume) recast participation in a museum context?

Chapter 1, 'Collective memory as affirmation: people-centered cultural heritage in a digital age' examines the potential of several kinds of social media in support of community-based heritage activities using examples from the United States, South America, Fiji, South Africa, Asia and Europe. The chapter stresses how the value of cultural heritage in a digital age lies in its power to stimulate ever-evolving community-based reflection and conversation on past, present and future identities.

Chapter 2, 'Socially distributed curation of the Bhopal disaster: a case of grassroots heritage in the crisis context' describes self-organizing curatorial activities by members of the public using social media in times of disasters. Based on the findings of a large-scale empirical investigation, the chapter discusses the potential of social media technologies as both tools and sites for grassroots heritage practices of online curation, focusing on the crisis narratives of the 1984 Bhopal gas leak as a case study.

Chapter 3, 'Museum of the self and digital death: an emerging curatorial dilemma for digital heritage' reviews current practices around online data storage in relation to memory and death. The chapter offers a critical discussion of the various strategies concerning how the personal legacy data that people leave behind could be accessed, curated and engaged for historical and heritage purposes, while at the same time being shared and kept 'alive' within communities of loved ones.

Chapter 4, 'Social traces: participation and the creation of shared heritage' reflects on the author's work in interactive exhibition design and her participation strategies. The chapter discusses how the 'social traces' that visitors leave on the exhibit can be used to facilitate broader connections, and create new communities and patterns of social interaction around the heritage. Based on this reflection, the author draws insights on the role that social media can have in redefining curatorial practices in the context of established museums as well as more informal heritage sites.

Public formation

In the presence of widely available social technologies, peer-to-peer activities such as information and media sharing are rapidly gaining momentum, as they increasingly promote and legitimate a participatory culture in which individuals aggregate on the basis of common interests and affinities. New publics are forming and evolving around focusing events that will grow to have historical and cultural significance (see Simon, this volume), around the everyday blogging of crafts and traditions (see Stuedahl and Mörtberg, this volume), around online and offline curation of social media content (see Iversen and Smith, this volume), and also in the context of convergent museum practices (see Russo, this volume). What practices of public formation and aggregation do social media support, and what possibilities for knowledge and dialogue are still unrealized or inherently problematic?

Chapter 5, ‘Remembering together: social media and the formation of the historical present’ explores how social media redefine the temporal and spatial boundaries of a historical event, and discusses how social media can support the formation of new publics by enabling strangers to share their experiences and renegotiate their relations to specific historical events and to each other. The chapter offers a critical understanding of how social media are currently being used for ‘remembering together’, and addresses the possibilities left unrealized by such practices.

Chapter 6, ‘Heritage knowledge, social media, and the sustainability of the intangible’ discusses how digital technologies and social media can be integrated in sustainable ways to support the documentation and sharing of intangible heritage knowledge and practices. Through cases studies concerning intangible heritage knowledge of craftsmanship related to the building of traditional wooden boats, the chapter illustrates how cultural sustainability concerns the ways in which participation is configured, and draws attention to the challenges of bringing continuity to the performed and changing character of intangible cultural heritage when re-manifested in digital forms.

Chapter 7, ‘Connecting to everyday practices: experiences from the Digital Natives exhibition’ describes how social media can be used, and even mimicked, to mediate between a museum’s exhibition space and audiences’ social practices. By unpacking the design and outcomes of the Digital Natives interactive exhibition, the chapter discusses how active audience engagement is not an end in itself, but a means to renew the connection between audiences’ everyday lives and matters of heritage, and to create unique moments of dialogue and interaction inside the exhibition space.

Chapter 8, ‘The rise of the “media museum”: creating interactive cultural experiences through social media’ provides an overview of how social media and social networking technologies are becoming increasingly important in the development of museum communication, and how audiences are invited to engage with cultural content. The chapter discusses the need for a shift in emphasis from issues of cultural content (whether consumed, crowdsourced or shared) to issues of cultural experience. This shift requires a finer understanding of audience participation and engagement in the context of convergent museum practices.

Sense of place

As computing becomes more pervasive and digital networks extend our surroundings, social media and technologies support new ways of engaging with the people, interpretations and values that pertain to a specific territorial setting. Creating or strengthening a sense of place means creating communication and interaction spaces capable of exploring and sustaining renewed forms of engagement with the physical and social settings of the heritage. Quick Response (QR) tagging (see Speed, this volume), photo sharing and collaborative mapping (see Coyne, this volume), and

social gaming (see Wakkary *et al.*, this volume) are just a few ways of re-articulating our sense of place through social media (even in the museum).

How can social media be used to expose and sustain the system of experiences, interpretations and expectations that contribute to continuous heritage interpretation and construction? What are the criticalities to account for when working with different knowledge systems, in different parts of the world? (See Bidwell and Winschiers-Theophilus, this volume.)

Chapter 9, 'Mosaics and multiples: online digital photography and the framing of heritage' offers a critique of amateur digital photography and examines the role and impact of emerging online practices (from online photo sharing to collaborative mapping) concerning how people come to understand space, place and heritage. The chapter discusses how the exponential growth of digital photographic archives has both the potential to expose differences that might otherwise go unacknowledged by comparison (the mosaic), and to defamiliarize and occlude by profusion aspects of heritage and place (the multiple).

Chapter 10, 'Mobile Ouija boards' reflects on three software projects and art interventions that were designed by the author with the intent to explore the opportunities offered by mobile social media and introduce elements of temporal reflection in our interactions with material artifacts and physical sites. Through a criticism of the rhetoric of contemporary technology, the chapter offers an alternative approach to how social networks can be placed at the core of digital heritage, in both its tangible and intangible manifestations.

Chapter 11, 'Extending connections between land and people digitally: designing with rural Herero communities in Namibia' describes the endeavors of the authors to enable rural people of the Herero tribe, in southern Africa, to extend their local knowledge practices digitally. The chapter offers an empirically grounded critique of how technologies (even social media) privilege particular ways of encountering, organizing and making sense of the world, and how these can conflict with the heritage that is lived in the connections between land and human dwellers in different parts of the world.

Chapter 12, 'Situating the sociability of interactive museum guides' analyzes emerging research approaches for interactive museum guides to describe the move from information delivery to sociability. Using several examples, the chapter discusses the need to refine what is meant by sociability with respect to technologies in museums, and what impact the trajectory toward museum guides as social technology tools has on the notion of the interactive museum guide.

Summary of aim and contribution

Heritage and Social Media provides readers with a framework to understand how the participatory culture fostered by social media changes the way in which we experience and think of heritage. Introducing readers to how social media are theorized and used, particularly outside the institutional domain, the volume reveals

through groundbreaking case studies the emerging heritage practices unique to social media. In doing so, the book unveils the new issues that are emerging from these practices and the new space for debate and critical argumentation that is required to illuminate what can be done in this burgeoning sector of heritage work.

References

- Ashton, K. (2009) 'That "Internet of Things" thing', *RFID Journal*, 22 June. <http://www.rfidjournal.com/article/view/4986> (accessed 7 December 2011).
- Byrne, D. (2008) 'Heritage as social action', in G. Fairclough, R. Harrison, J. Schonfield and J. H. Jameson (eds) *The Heritage Reader*, London: Routledge.
- Council of Europe (2005) Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/identities/default_EN.asp (accessed 6 December 2011).
- Fairclough, G. (2009) 'New heritage frontiers', in D. Therond and A. Trigona (eds) *Heritage and Beyond*, Brussels: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Fischer, G. (2011) 'Understanding, fostering, and supporting cultures of participation', *Interactions*, 18(3): 42–53.
- Giaccardi, E. (2011) 'Things we value', *Interactions*, 18(1): 17–21.
- Giaccardi, E., Churchill, E. and Liu, S.B. (2012) 'Heritage matters: Designing for current and future values through digital and social technologies', *Proceedings of CHI 2012*, New York: ACM Press.
- Greenfield, A. (2006) *Everyware: The Dawning Age of Ubiquitous Computing*, Berkeley, CA: New Riders.
- Jenkins, H., Puroshotma, R., Clinton, K., Weigel, M. and Robison, A.J. (2006) *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Chicago, IL: The MacArthur Foundation. <http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/files/working/NMLWhitePaper.pdf> (accessed 3 November 2011).
- Leadbeater, C. (2010) *Cloud Culture: The Future of Global Cultural Relations*, London: Counterpoint.
- LeBlanc, F. (1993) 'Is everything heritage?' *ICOMOS Canada Bulletin*, 2(2): 2–3.
- Lowenthal, D. (2005) 'Stewarding the future', *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship*, 2(2): 6–25.
- McCarthy, J. and Wright, P. (2004) *Technology as Experience*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005) *What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*. <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (posted 30 September 2005; accessed 6 December 2011).
- Setten, G. (2005) 'Farming the heritage: On the production and construction of a personal and practised landscape heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 11(1): 67–79.
- Shirky, C. (2008) *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, New York: Penguin Press.
- Simon, N. (2010) *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0.
- Smith, L. (2006) *Uses of Heritage*, London: Routledge.
- Thomas, J. (2004) *Archeology and Modernity*, London: Routledge.
- Van Oost, O. (2012) 'Rethinking the museum: Cultural heritage and the Internet of Things', in C. van den Akker (ed.) *Museum Transfigurations. Curation and Co-creation of Collections in the Digital Age*, Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books.
- West, S. (2010) (ed.) *Understanding Heritage in Practice*, Milton Keynes: The Open University.