(in)significance:

a discussion about values and valuing in heritage

A one-day symposium, Friday 15 May 9-5pm, Ann Harding Conference Centre, University of Canberra

Conveners: Tracy Ireland and Steve Brown

Final Programme

8.30 Registration, coffee and socialising

Session 1 *history and practice* 9.00 – 11.00	▪ What is standard practice for the application of significance in heritage, museums, archives, libraries and other locations? ▪ What is being taught at tertiary levels on the theory and application of significance?	
9.00 – 9.20	Welcome and outline of Symposium: why (in)significance?	Tracy Ireland
9.20 – 9.35	Perspective 1. 'places of cultural significance'	Bronwyn Hanna
9.35 – 9.45	Perspective 3. Social value determinations - changes in the looking glass	Jane Harrington
9.45 – 9.55	Perspective 4. Significance: Pluralism, intellectualism and the crafting of tools	Robyn Slogett
9.55 – 10.05	Perspective 5. Conservation communities	Alison Wain
10.05 – 10.15	Perspective 6. Grappling with AIM734 - Understanding significance	Linda Young
10.15 – 11.00	Discussion. What's changed since 1979? Where are the overlaps and separations across fields of practice?	Panel of 6 presenters Facilitator: Kristal Buckley

11.00 – 11.30 Morning tea break

Session 2 *theory and critique* 11.30 – 13.00	▪ Are values past, present or future oriented? ▪ How do recent critiques of nature/culture dichotomies impact on significance assessment? ▪ How does recent research into the affective and emotional dimensions of heritage impact significance assessment? ▪ Are there clear and well understood distinctions between materials, materiality and values?	
11:30 – 11.40	Critique 1. Car yards to cafes	Ursula Frederick
11.40 – 11.50	Critique 2. Significance for whom? Objectivity and community in heritage practice	Adam Dickerson
11.50 – 12.00	Critique 3. Nature and Culture	Kristal Buckley
12.00 – 12.10	Critique 4. The tautology of 'intangible values'	Laurajane Smith
12.10 – 12.20	Critique 5. Reduced to insignificance? Valuing emotion and empathy	Steve Brown

12.20 – 12.30	Critique 6. Significance and the supernatural	Denis Byrne
12.30 – 13.00	Panel discussion. Why have these critiques arisen – what's driving them? Do they have traction across fields of practice?	Panel of 6 presenters Facilitator: Tim Winter

13.00 – 14.00 LUNCH

Session 3 *Practice-led theory* 14.00 – 15.30	▪ What is the ongoing influence of modernist concepts of universal value? ▪ How does significance assessment intersect with concepts of ethics, social justice and sustainability? ▪ How do concepts of significance work within the digital domain?	
14:00 – 14.10	Case Study 1. Significance at scale - understanding the value of 150 million newspaper articles	Tim Sherratt
14.10 – 14.20	Case Study 2. Significance in the digital domain	Geoff Hinchcliffe
14.20—14.30	Case Study 3. Sustainable Heritage vs Sustainable Us	Veronica Bullock
14.30 – 14.40	Case Study 4. Museums as creative laboratories	Angelina Russo
14.40 – 14.50	Case Study 5. The political value of heritage	Tim Winter
14.50 – 15.00	Case Study 6. The ethics of insignificance	Tracy Ireland
15.00 – 15.30	Panel Discussion.	Panel of 5 presenters Facilitator: Denis Byrne

15.30 – 16.00 Afternoon tea break

Session 4 *actions* 16.00 – 17.00	▪ What contribution can this symposium make to theory and practice concerning (in)significance and values? ▪ In what ways might this be achieved? ▪ What theoretical roadblocks, research and creative directions for practice might we recognise?	
16.00 – 16.10	Reflection 1	Ross Gibson
16.10 – 16.20	Reflection 2	Sharon Sullivan
16.20 – 16.50	Key issues, defining actions	Facilitated discussion
16.50 – 17.00	Wrap up. Communicating 'messages' from the Symposium.	Tracy Ireland and Steve Brown

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Speakers and Abstracts

Session 1 - *history and practice*

Bronwyn Hanna – *'places of cultural significance'*

The Australia ICOMOS *Burra Charter* has been internationally acclaimed for its 'values based conservation' approach and has helped shift the emphasis in heritage practice from material fabric to the meanings that people attribute to places. This talk draws on oral history interviews with Australia ICOMOS members who wrote the original *Burra Charter* in 1979 and the major revision in 1999 to briefly discuss how the term 'significance' became important.

Jane Harrington - *Social value determinations - changes in the looking glass*

Social value has evolved to become an established component of assessments of heritage significance. But have our methodological and theoretical approaches to the assessment of social value evolved equivalently? Or are we out of step?

Robyn Slogett - *Significance: Pluralism, intellectualism and the crafting of tools*

Significance has proved to be a useful tool in procedural issues (eg Export of Movable Cultural Heritage, Heritage Grants, MAP etc.), but cannot in its current form be elevated to an intellectual position, nor can it address issues of pluralism. It is therefore a useful, but specific tool that supports bureaucratic procedural rigour in a way that is beneficial to some parts of the sector, but claims of objectivity are insecurely based.

Alison Wain - *Conservation communities*

Close, personal connections encourage passionate, participatory involvement in heritage. This approach is often felt to conflict with the more respectful stewardship approach adopted by people with less immediate connections. In this talk I discuss the differences between detached and participative cultural spaces, and the role of creativity in the making of new personal meanings for heritage.

Linda Young - *Grappling with AIM734 - Understanding significance*

I'm in the thick of teaching a new unit, part of Deakin's Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies group project to bring along the uneven, but surely certain, convergence in thinking about and managing heritage places, objects/collections and intangibles. I hope we're establishing a broad umbrella of heritage; it's somewhat rocky, but I'm glad to share it with this meeting.

Session 2 - *theory and critique*

Ursula Frederick - *Car yards to cafes*

In the lead up to its centenary, Canberra's civic centre has undergone substantial transformation. Once the motoring heart of the nation's capitol, the suburb of Braddon is now a hub for hipsters enjoying life in the inner-city. This paper explores the role of place-making as a practice of performance, erasure and re-purposing, whereby the values and memories associated with place are selectively remembered and forgotten through heritage. From burning rubber to roasting beans, the transformation of Braddon is discussed specifically through the lens of visual anthropology and creative practice, to consider how cultures of the (in)significant may be imagined.

Adam Dickerson - *Significance for whom? Objectivity and community in heritage practice*

This talk examines the question of the objectivity of judgments of significance. In particular, if a realist conception of the property of 'significance' is implausible, does that mean we must recoil into a relativist conception of it? However, if significance means 'significance for us' then everything hangs on who this we might be.

Kristal Buckley - *Nature and Culture*

If we know well that the duality of nature and culture is constructed and not universal – and we know that treating them separately within heritage systems of evaluation and decision making is problematic – then why it is it so hard to make a shift?

Laurajane Smith - *The tautology of 'intangible values'*

This presentation will argue that the tautological phrase 'intangible value' is more than a linguistic irritant, and that it does explicit and material political work in devaluing non-expert heritage values and associations. This phrase is a strategic response from within the AHD, and reasserts expert values in light of challenges offered by the increasing policy prevalence of both community inclusion and intangible heritage.

Steve Brown - *reduced to insignificance? valuing emotion and empathy*

In Australian heritage practice statements of values typically present as empirical, expert and unemotional. I am critical of assessments that exclusively represent and value heritage objects, places and landscapes in this way. I argue for the inclusion of affective, emotional and personal dimensions in order to engage different audiences.

Denis Byrne - *Significance and the supernatural*

'A very large proportion of religious believers in the world today engage with temples, shrines, churches and sacred natural landscape features on the understanding that they possess supernatural, miraculous force. They assess the significance of such sites principally via their miraculous efficacy. Can such efficacy be accommodated within the secular-rational systems of significance assessment employed in heritage practice?'

Session 3 - *Practice-led theory*

Tim Sherratt - *Significance at scale: understanding the value of 150 million newspaper articles*

What happens when you make millions of newspaper articles, documenting 150 years of Australian history, freely available online? It's not just a matter of convenience — scale and access change the questions we can ask, the relationships we can form with the past. How do we understand significance in the context of abundance?

Geoff Hinchcliffe - *Significance in the digital domain*

Traditionally significance has been used as a criterion for preservation but mass digitisation reduces the significance judgment from the process - digitise and save it all! While individual digital records may hold little historical value the large-scale collections to which they belong can become significant sites for new forms of access, exploration and representation.

Veronica Bullock - *Sustainable Heritage vs Sustainable Us'*

This presentation asks what heritage theorists and practitioners can contribute to societies dealing with the seven interlocking crises of sustainability. After visiting recent thinking on sustainability it suggests that cultural heritage significance assessment experience, and deeper conceptualisation of time/process, can helpfully shape the conversation we are 'aching for'.

Angelina Russo - *Museums as creative laboratories*

Increasingly, creative production is recognized as both the result of skilled practitioners and their connection to and participation in a networked society.
Museums offer trusted authoritative environments through which to explore these new collaborations between creators and producers: to gather culturally diverse experiences and propose new models for co-creation and knowledge production.
In this talk we explore how creative communities connect with museums to achieve innovative solutions by viewing museums as a laboratory for both conservation and new knowledge production.

Tim Winter -*The political values of heritage*

This short presentation focuses on the different ways in which we might think about the political values that enmesh heritage. Within that broad theme some questions will be posed about how we might better conceptualise the political, where we look for it, and how we should think through understanding what constitutes a politics of heritage today.

Tracy Ireland - *The ethics of insignificance*

Heritage conservation is usually portrayed as inherently ethical. Recent discussions have questioned the uncritical acceptance of this position however, how exactly might we enact an ethical form of forgetting in the context of the cultural politics of heritage, identity and social justice. This chat explores the relationship between ethics, forgetting and (in)significance.