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CENTRO DE CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS E SOCIAIS – CCH

PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM HISTÓRIA – PPGH

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MACDONALD, Sharon. "Museum Europe, Negotiating Heritage". *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*. 17 (2008): 47–65, p. 50-51.

Approaching Heritage

In some academic, and also more popular commentary, heritage has been the subject of critique that casts it as a symptom or even cause of various contemporary social ills. This is especially so in critiques which go under the label of 'the heritage industry', represented by Robert Hewison's book of that title (Hewison 1985; see also McGuigan 1996; Littler and Naidoo 2005). In particular, the fact of trying to create, and sometimes recreate, unified heritages, especially patriotic national heritages, is seen as a symptom of the exclusion or marginalisation of others – and as having the effect of solidifying and further extending such exclusion and marginalisation (cf. Boswell and Evans 1999). Such perspectives are generally based on structural theories of identity that propose that the creation of positive senses of collective self-identity has as a (usually necessary) correlate the establishment of more negatively viewed others (or 'an Other'), and the creation of arenas in which a homogeneous and united identity is performed (cf. Jenkins 1996). They tend to focus upon contexts in which heritage is created by the relatively powerful, often directly by institutions of the nation-state. Heritage, then, is typically viewed as a tool for instituting certain ideological functions (especially creating a sense of common purpose and affinity to collective ideals); and work conducted tends to focus upon the invented elements of heritage, and on the processes of 'othering' or silencing of certain aspects of history that may be involved. As such, heritage tends to be derided, either explicitly or more implicitly, as somehow inauthentic. Such critiques are also often coupled with a vision of heritage as acting like a dead weight – dragging us down and back into the past; getting us bogged down or stuck there; and of stifling contemporary creativity through the strictures of adherence to

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tradition. That is, they cast an emphasis on the past as bound up with an avoidance of the present – not so much about remembering the past as avoiding the here and now. This is why Andreas Huyssen (1995, 2003) discusses what he calls a memory obsession as, apparently paradoxically, part of a ‘culture of amnesia’. Heritage is, in his view, a manifestation of a nostalgia that is more about obscuring aspects of the present – and perhaps of certain histories or versions of them – than of a more wholesale or wholesome recalling of the past, even though (indeed perhaps because) it is so driven by concerns of the present.”

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