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## Heritage, Tourism and Emotion

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### Heritage, Tourism and Emotion<sup>\*</sup>

The present paper starts with a discussion of the relationship between heritage and tradition and proceeds to address the complex process of assigning meaning to heritage and to objects, places and sociocultural practices. In this context, tourism presents itself as a powerful means of enhancing the emotional significance of such objects, places and social practices. The current pursuit of emotional experiences plays a key role not just in the development of *memory* tourism, but also in *dark* tourism and *reality* tourism. The different ways in which those experiences are perceived are seen here as modes of social dispute over meanings. Today's emphasis on the psycho-emotional aspects of the tourist experience suggests the possibility of a sharp worldwide increase in tourist supply of a strong emotional kind.

**Keywords:** places; memories; objects; heritage; sociocultural practices; tourism – psycho-emotional aspects.

### Introduction

These are times of constant threats and risks, when any attempt to describe the world has proved to be a truly complex task. We no longer have at our disposal the solid political, cultural and ideological referents that used to frame our analysis and interpretation of the world just a few decades ago. In this regard, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989, stands as a watershed. The fall was accompanied by the collapse of the political and ideological beliefs underlying many a bold description and classification of the world and by the spread of the seeds of neoliberalism, which at once naturalizes and enfeebls today's political and academic debate.

In this context, the debate on heritage and tourism continues to be quite relevant, but it takes on new contours that need to be considered. An examination of the relations between these two cultural areas will allow us to put into proper perspective not only the ways in which they feed each other, but also the ways in which they influence behaviors and beliefs regarding society in general.

With respect to the way in which heritage relates to tourism and society, I would like to begin by submitting a premise that is fairly disseminated these days, and according to which the actions aimed at heritage conservation and protection have no direct relationship to the notion that human beings are possessed of an unfaltering desire to preserve and maintain

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their traditions and ways of life. I do grant that passing on one's cultural tradition to future generations is a political and cultural imperative of humankind, but it is also my contention that the argument for heritage conservation and protection has its own institutional autonomy and should not be confused with preserving the sociocultural traditions of communities and nations.<sup>1</sup>

### **Heritage and tradition**

What does it mean to say that to preserve one's *heritage* is not the same as to preserve cultural *tradition*?

The difference between the two resides, first of all, in the fact that tradition, viewed as the cultural reproduction of behavioral patterns and ways of thinking and doing, manifests itself at every instant in our social practices, evincing a vibrancy and dynamism that lend it a concrete, constantly renewed and almost plastic quality while also reinforcing a reassuring sense of proximity to one's social past. In contradistinction to tradition's sense of proximity between past and present, the institutional practice associated with heritage conservation calls, first and foremost, for the establishment of a historical distance by means of which the objects, places or social practices can be seen as documents of a more or less remote past. The establishment of such a temporal distance is crucial for heritage itself to be named and endowed with meaning. In fact, in that very distance resides the patrimonializing, or heritage-instituting, act, here understood as the ability of political institutions to define what the historical and cultural heritage is / is not, and thereby stipulate what should / should not be the object of protection or conservation, which is to say, of formal and broad social recognition.

Typically the heritage-instituting act has to do with the formal recognition of certain objects, places or sociocultural practices that happen to be (re)invested with historical meaning, even if they are devoid of any link to present collective life or to their past functions and meanings. This process, which I have termed the "detraditionalization of tradition" (Fortuna, 1997), entails an acknowledgement of the ontological autonomy of the patrimonialized goods. In other words, if the patrimonialized objects, places or sociocultural

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, according to Neil Silberman, today's excessive emphasis on heritage preservation, caused in part by the modern tourism industry, is prone to lead to a parody of nations and communities, given the elaborate efforts to suit them to the goals of contemporary mass tourism (Silberman, 1996).

practices cease to be significantly linked to the subjects' actual everyday existence, they *ipso facto* start to be viewed as an end in themselves. They may then, by virtue of the temporal distance underpinning their being recognized as heritage, present themselves as disconnected from their immediate reality and the lived present, as well as severed from the specific social uses they may have once had.

This allows for a clarification of the distinction between the cultural, material and symbolic aspects that make up what we call tradition. The most trivial of social acts, the casual use of certain instruments or, by the same token, the prosaic use of language and the familiar ways in which we go about things, are all constitutive elements of tradition and are, therefore, carried out as part of our habits, without recourse to mental or practical protocols. Ordinary use, in such instances, is the most basic practical means for the preservation of tradition, and therefore quite distinct from the conceptual elaboration and the selection that preside over the definition of heritage.

This is not to say that social life can follow its normal course without the presence of heritage. Today's patrimonialist strategies seek to ground their action exclusively on the preservation of endangered resources, both material and cultural. But we can see through such fallacious rhetoric. These are times of blatant inflation as far as heritage is concerned, where patrimonialization (i.e., the process of transforming places, traditions, and artifacts into heritage to be protected and exhibited) is also at the service of the market and of tourism. Heritage inflation has its limitations in terms of efficacy. Hence Henri-Pierre Jeudy's legitimate question as to whether future action aimed at heritage protection will not reside in unavoidable, selective destruction or in the declassification of some of the goods that now have heritage status (Jeudy, 2008).

The objects, places and sociocultural practices with heritage status are invested with historical and cultural meanings that highlight mnemonic, aesthetic or technical-scientific traits and values which transcend the original meaning and value directly associated with their past practical usefulness. The question at hand – to stay with the above notion regarding our turbulent times and the difficulties of classification resulting from the collapse of the old epistemological and theoretical certainties – is to ascertain the current meaning of heritage and who is to define it.

I will here avail myself of the classic interpreter of "the modern cult of monuments," Austrian author Aloïs Riegl (1858-1905), who held that the meaning of monuments does not

lie in what such works may have been or stood for, nor in the use they once may have been put to, not to mention the fact that oftentimes they no longer bear any connection to their original purpose. On the contrary, the attribution, in the present, of value and meaning to those goods and resources, according to Riegl (1984), is mainly the responsibility of modern subjects. As such, we ourselves update the meaning of heritage in accordance with our own value systems, and in this way we transfer a variety of operative meanings onto a number of objects, places and sociocultural practices from a more or less remote past, which in turn update the present they seek to be in harmony with (Choay, 1999).

This constitutes extraordinary food for thought. Still, Riegl's definition of patrimonial value leaves open the following question: Ultimately, what is the real source of the value and meaning of heritage in general? The main difficulty in this regard is to identify the agents that actually produce the patrimonial meaning inscribed in the classified goods. And here we are faced with a wide range of possibilities. The attribution of meaning is a task many social players can engage in. On one hand, it may be seen as a specialized skill possessed by experts – academics, scientists, technicians – or by agents closely associated with the heritage market, such as entrepreneurs, promoters, journalists, or tourism operators. On the other hand, the classification of, and attribution of meaning to, heritage may be the result of the practice of tourism itself – for tourists, as the immediate recipients and consumers of heritage, are not exempt from freely assigning unique attributes and meanings to the objects, places or practices which they consume – just as it may also be the work of citizens, associations and movements of a civic, political or social nature.

The attribution of value is closely linked to the specific nature of the heritage items in question. In the case of symbolic events and historical celebrations, for instance, value is typically attributed solely by experts. When it comes to the historical value of a given work or place, however, value may be the “consensual” outcome of informal acts of both negotiation and confrontation between experts and the public at large. This is the case, for example, with numerous attributions of patrimonial value at the local or municipal level, where recognition derives from participatory initiatives promoted within the community.

In other instances, namely in situations that are not institutionally covered, the attribution of meaning falls on the direct recipients, such as tourists with no link to the contextual reality. This is the case with remnants of the cultural past that tend to draw meaning from the mere fact that they are thought to be exemplars of an alleged distant

past. It should be added that on occasion the meaning of heritage is the object of differing interpretations by the technical experts and the tourist consumers. Thus, while the former tend to assess situations according to elitist criteria that lay claim to universality, the latter often tend to spontaneously value material and immaterial popular culture expressions of what they deem to be historically relevant to a particular community. There is virtually no dialogue between these two approaches, apart from the mediation resulting from the occasional meetings, conferences or texts devoted to the study of the reasons for this technical and ideological clash and the way in which it occurs.

### **Tourism and emotion**

Saying that there is no actual dialogue among the different views on the meaning of heritage is not the same as saying that the definition of what cultural heritage is cannot be understood as the outcome of a process whereby disputed meanings are negotiated. That is why even the abstract, well established values commonly attributed to historical heritage – *e.g.* antiquity, authenticity, rarity or beauty – are likely to have their meaning altered whenever the emotional, social or political inclination of the recipients is added to the more pragmatic criteria of the experts. In fact, there is nowadays an obvious emphasis on the practical effects of emotion (or collective emotion) that is associated, for instance, with the drama and sublimity bestowed on a heritage object or asset on account of its aesthetic uniqueness or historical rarity.<sup>2</sup> The concept of emotion I am using here is clearly indebted to the concept formulated by neuroscientist António Damásio (2003), which refers to the way in which the body responds to outside stimuli as they are processed by the brain. This process can be of a more or less conscious nature, and so when I speak of emotion I mean an autonomous reaction on the part of the body, of which the individual may not be aware. This particular sense of the term – somewhat close to the notion of feeling and affect – has gained wide currency in the social sciences.

Thus we can assume, with David Lowenthal (1975: 52-67), that emotion can be intimately linked to that feeling of a shared past that the *antiquity* of things and places has the potential to stir in every individual. It is a most singular sensation, stemming from our being able to visit, witness or even touch the vestiges, perhaps unique ones, of a more or less

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<sup>2</sup> The present paper does not address the causes of this phenomenon. Instead, it dwells more fully on its effects.

significant cultural or architectural past. The antiquity of heritage fosters a feeling of closeness to a(n) (imagined?) community marked by a well-balanced coexistence of technology, art, culture and nature, a feeling that proves both reassuring and moving when compared to our messy present.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, however, the sight of vestiges of the past is also conducive to a feeling of being in the presence of something truly *original* or whose *rarity* strikes us as absolutely exceptional and therefore highly appreciated in today's repetitive, copycat consumer culture. The perception of the past in terms of *continuity* and *sequence* is the kind of feeling that heritage allows us to experience, as it conveys an impression of cumulativeness that amounts to a cultural process in which we engage both as inheritors and bequeathers at once. This dual condition extends to the notion of *finality*, which is also a hallmark of heritage and often read as a sign of personal or civilizational stability, since it tends to be recognized as the ability to see a project through its full completion – as opposed to the feeling of guilt over an unfinished work, in itself a sign of present disorder and of a compromised, ever-postponed future.

The above attributes of historical heritage and of monuments in particular can be expanded to other aspects that affect the psycho-emotional conditions of reception by visitors and tourists alike. Natalie Heinich emphasizes the way in which *authenticity* triggers an emotion centered on aspects related to the monument's origin and current condition (Heinich, 2009: 66-67). By the same token, one is likely to feel moved by the simple presence of an edifice or by the memory of some famous personage who happened to live, work, or die there, or who, more prosaically even, made use of some artifact, no matter how trivial. And then there is also the *beauty* of monuments, which is prone to prompt an aesthetic selection of their most salient representative elements (*ibid.*: 244). This, in my view, is a dramatic and emotional aspect seldom taken into account in the appraisal of the patrimonial value and the meaning attributed to objects, places, or practices of the past.

The above digression on the attributes of patrimonialized goods of the past allows us to understand the potential for psychological stimulation inherent in the reception or tourist consumption of historical heritage. Notwithstanding the argument – going as far back as

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<sup>3</sup> The German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel offered an original approach to this topic in his 1911 paper on "the ruin" and the tension between *culture* and *nature*. According to Simmel, there emanates from the age-old ruin a feeling of peace and gravity having to do with the telluric demise of human works (culture) under nature's power (the collapse of buildings) and the establishment of a new balance of factors (Simmel, 1959). We shall come back to the theme of emotion set off by the contemplation of ruins.

Walter Benjamin's reflections on the problem of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin, 1968) – that the massive use of information and communication technologies (as illustrated by modern tourism) to replicate the images of and references to the salient elements of our built or natural heritage is bound to diminish the emotional impact felt by individuals, the fact is that such technologies tend to enhance, rather than diminish, the level of personal gratification and emotivity caused by close contact with the patrimonialized object.

As I have observed elsewhere in this regard (Fortuna 1999: 32), in 1896 Pierre de Coubertin, the founding father of the modern Olympics, recorded in his journal the "overwhelming sensations" elicited in him by the ruins of Olympia:

I kept watch for sunrise, and as soon as its first rays had crossed the valley, I rushed toward the ruins. [...] It was a moral architecture I was going to gather lessons from, and it magnified every dimension. My meditation lasted all morning. [...] All morning long I wandered in the ruins. (Coubertin, *apud* Rojek, 1993: 113)

As described by Coubertin, the ruins' peculiar power to make visitors feel as if the present has been suspended and to embark on a sort of reverie, derives from the direct, combined psychological effect that the attributes of the historical and monumental heritage – antiquity, rarity, continuity, sequence, finality, authenticity and beauty – may have on art recipients in general and tourists in particular. Standing before the ruins, the man behind the modern Olympic Games is also clearly possessed of that melancholy feeling that is typical of the romantic vision of artists, writers and poets, and of which Christopher Woodward (2002) gives such a compelling account.

To be accurate, it should be added that, according to Walter Benjamin, the state of heightened concentration with which individuals perceive artistic or architectural objects, whether in a tourism-related or any other context, can result in the observing subjects being absorbed by the objects, as opposed to the state of distracted perception in which it is the objects that get to be absorbed by the subjects (Benjamin, 1968: 239). The subjects' emotional response is produced, not by their immediate experience, but rather by their interpretation of the particular circumstances of that experience. Furthermore, the emotion experienced by individuals at a given moment in time depends on their degree of belonging and identification with the surrounding culturescape. In other words, emotions are but the specific ways in which individuals are connected to their respective communities, and their



significance grows in proportion to the individuals' sense of collective participation in those communities (Le Breton, 2009: 126).

As to the above-mentioned idea of emotion as sentiment, it partakes of the whole notion of bodily changes caused in a more or less autonomous way by all sorts of inner drives and external stimuli. Here we enter the realm of unconscious dimensions, corresponding to feelings eliciting from the body physiological responses that are neither immediate nor linear. This means that the response of individuals to the same stimulus may not only vary but be actually determined by other aspects, such as the recollection or knowledge of responses experienced by others. As already pointed out, the feeling of heightened enjoyment and total evasion derived by Pierre de Coubertin from his close contact with the ruins of Olympia requires a certain degree of identification with others with whom the symbolic meaning of the place can be shared. Under similar circumstances, the contemplation of such alluring, entrancing places as those described by Coubertin may ultimately generate the feeling of "loss of a sense of reality" and even lead to the psycho-emotional imbalance conventionally termed the "Stendhal syndrome." This is a pathological, non-conscious condition, a psychic disturbance involving dizziness, tachycardia and hallucinations. It is a result of the intense excitement caused by an individual's reaction to the beauty and perfection of the objects or places s/he comes face to face with (Magherini, 1989), a feeling which is culturally shared with those who – as is the case with Stendhal – manifest a profound sense of romantic evasion.

This state of affairs should be acknowledged both as a central ingredient in any strategy aimed at promoting historic and monumental tourism, and as a feature of heritage politics in general. In view of the current inflationary trend in the conservation of objects, places and sociocultural traditions – which seems to intensify in times of economic and social crisis – the use of heritage seems to support Jean Baudrillard's claim with regard to consumer culture: it is the so-called traditional objects, places and sociocultural practices that conserve us, not the other way around.

Nowadays, the relationship of heritage with the past is intimately linked to the whole debate on the place of memory in contemporary society, and the way in which this fact relates to the tourism industry is, in itself, proof of the key role played by history and culture in certain types of modern tourism. We now live literally immersed in and seduced by collective memory, its objectification and its narrative. Many contemporary tourist cities

owe their importance as popular visiting sites in a highly competitive international market precisely to the way in which they value and invest in their own past (Sturken, 2007).

The city of Berlin is a clear illustration of this powerful relationship between tourism, heritage, and a memory of the city based on an impressive historical narrative of its past.<sup>4</sup> In fact, tourism is the driving force and the main beneficiary of this new industry, which is not just urban and cultural but also heritage-related. It is worth remembering, however, that as early as the 1920s Robert Musil, who was to become famous for his novel *The Man Without Qualities*, exposed the paradoxical invisibility of Berlin's public monuments. Musil's critique was intended to proclaim that our ignorance about ancient monuments, their true history, the identity of their occupants and the nature of the ceremonies for which they once offered a setting creates a feeling of indifference in striking contrast to what I have just said about their power to move and stir us. This indifference, often shared in equal parts by tourists and local residents, causes buildings, monuments and heritage in general to be regarded with as much detachment as if they were not there at all. Paradoxically, according to Musil the monument's mental invisibility is intensified as at every instant, on either side of the street, other monuments and works of incalculable architectural value stand before our absent-minded eyes and total lack of information. The message here concerns the need to be taught on the history and heritage of cities. Without such an education collective memory seems to cease to exist, which in turn has negative repercussions on tourist potential at the local level, as the industry professionals know only too well.

There is no denying the topicality of the relationship between tourism, education and memory. On the one hand, we can consider the fact a vast number of heritage policies these days promotes a virtual race to the landmarks of local history and local memory. On the other hand, we should reflect on the role of the artistic strategy adopted by Javacheff Christo and Jeanne Claude, when they shroud – thereby rendering invisible – unique natural and architectural sites. Is this a paradoxical way of showing by hiding? We may well agree with that, considering how visitors and tourists flocked by the thousands to admire the two

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<sup>4</sup> A recent study on the city of Coimbra tested this hypothesis of the close relationship between tourism and heritage. As it turns out, Coimbra's tourism strategy hinges primarily on one single historical-patrimonial resource – the University – both with regard to its buildings and to its immaterial heritage. That was, in fact, the basis of the University's recent application to be inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List, which only shows the failure to enhance other elements of the local urban-cultural heritage (Fortuna *et al.*, 2012b).

renowned artists' aesthetics of packaging when, in June 1995, they kept the Berlin Reichstag in wraps for 14 days.<sup>5</sup>

The power of seduction (or emotion) exerted by the monument upon its visitors is threatened by continuous repetition and, most of all, by the lack of information about its real meaning. In the words of the contemporary German philosopher Andreas Huyssen, the feeling is expressed in the paradoxical assertion according to which Berlin is becoming invisible because nothing is less visible than a monument (Huyssen, 2003: 32). In this light, the well-known artistic endeavors by Javacheff Christo and Jeanne Claude are proof of the real meaning of that monumentality which finds in the (temporary) "disappearance" of monuments one of the most unexpected articulations of their value and their narrative.

But let us return to the question of the relationship between heritage and memory. Since memory is mostly materialized in spatial terms, it may be argued that the twentieth century, with its surge of sites devoted to the celebration of collective memory, was characterized by a hypertrophy of memory. We adopted places of memory to record the vanished "atmospheres" that are believed to have once existed in well-delimited territories. Metaphorically, it was as if we focused on the traces of the past in order to preserve the signs of the most significant roots of our identity, which amounts to a symbolic reenactment of territorialized intimacies – i.e., of what we might call "microterritorialities" (Fortuna, 2012a). There are instances in which the kind of tourism that feeds on the memory and monumentality of places seems to be trying to compensate individuals for losing their cultural identity, or to compensate whole peoples for their loss of identity as nations or communities.<sup>6</sup> In other instances, however, it is as if this identity were afraid of being shown, lest it reveal the atrocities and even the horror of our past history. Such cases work as cautionary tales to prevent tragedy from repeating itself. Isn't this the reason why, for example, Anne Frank's house has become one of Amsterdam's main tourist attractions?

<sup>5</sup> John Cage's famous music piece 4'33", just as, in the domain of cinema, the film *Snow White* by Portuguese director João César Monteiro, upend the conventional meaning of artistic performance and take on some traits of the aesthetic and emotional paroxysm reached by art in the creations of J. Christo and J. Claude.

<sup>6</sup> This particular hypothesis shows much of the heuristic potential of the notion of "compensatory space," proposed by Fredric Jameson (1991) and later developed by Wong Chong Thai (1997) to designate the place where all sorts of subjectivities meet, and which therefore may serve as an alternative to the demarcated space of personal or group interests. As the pursuit of alternative personal spaces and experiences, tourism can be viewed as a means for creating "compensatory" spaces, including in the context of historical-monumental spaces, which, as I have argued elsewhere, fuel the search for the roots of one's identity (Fortuna, 1999: 23-44).

In fact, tourism as we know it today has become one of the most powerful vehicles of the memory industry and of the abuses and savagery of civilization in particular. *Dark tourism* – a term often used to refer to this craving for the past history of horror – is clearly on the rise, as it promotes places associated with brutality, terror, suffering and death (Janssen and Lagerkvist, 2009). The same applies to the tourist exploitation of places made notorious by the practice of crimes. The ability of such places to entice the curiosity of visitors goes back to the early nineteenth century, thanks to the efforts of tourist agents and promoters, but also publishers and booksellers. We may ask ourselves why we ended up accepting and encouraging such trivialization of horror and such non-sense, given its inherently paradoxical sense of history. We look on, without protest and hardly any indignation, as these sites are constantly turned into first-rate attractions of contemporary leisure and tourism. With the complacency and actual support of governments, substantial investments from global tourism are devoted to the instrumentalization of such places and the promotion of the narrative of human suffering they evoke. From Nelson Mandela's prison to the Jewish extermination camps, from New York's Ground Zero to the hellish work conditions of native American laborers in the colonial mines of Potosi (Bolivia), all these *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1986) have come to be viewed as modes of re-presenting a variety of more or less exotic, if not macabre, ways of "belonging" to a community and partaking in a certain collective "experience."<sup>7</sup> And this in spite of what such "experiences" represent in terms of cultural loss and affront to democracy and human dignity. The irony of the emotions generated by this sort of "experience" can only be understood within the framework of the tourism system that characterizes today's *post-emotional* society and the socio-temperamental barbarism it promotes (Meštrović, 1993).

At stake here is the conversion of these sites of contemporary tourism into Foucauldian heterotopias, that is to say, into places laden with unexpected or unfamiliar meanings (Foucault, 1986), like *counter-sites*, which convey locally embedded narratives and meanings alongside fanciful descriptions, so that they have a *real* existence while being *out of place*.

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<sup>7</sup> Besides these tourist offerings of unusual places marked by a past of horror and suffering, we are now also given a steady choice of hallucinating travel experiences that not too long ago were considered mere fantasies of utopian writers. Hence the recent offerings of adventure tourism with their promise of unique sensations, such as those derived from a ten-minute space trip at 4,200 km per hour, or a 2 ½ hours descent into the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean, the deepest point on Earth (11 kms) (Lopes, 2012).

Having said that, I also wish to point out the fact that the current hypertrophy of memory is, to a large extent, fueled by tourism (namely historical and cultural tourism). Indeed, tourism has fostered many narratives about experiences and identities whose meanings are constantly being reinterpreted and often made to fit standardized codes of acceptance. Such acceptance seems to be predicated on the emphasis given to the emotions and ways of being and feeling of modern individuals, rather than on a critique of objective history or on a rejection of historiography as an instrument of ideological domination (Haroche, 2008). Both tourism as a practice and the *post-tourist* subject (Urry, 1990) resist all objective readings of the past and of history. In truth, they mistrust all fantasies of the future, even though they accept and promote or consume their enactment and seem ready to experience that simulacrum of reality, provided that the emotions thus afforded are powerful and *realistic* enough.

There is nothing problematic about the fact that it falls on tourism to engender the narrative of our culture's superimposed, patrimonialized times and places. I can even speculate that we may soon have to adapt ourselves to the *touristification of emotion*, wherever the possibility arises to forge extreme settings and experiences. I can think, for example, of the likelihood of the use, for tourist purposes, of an experience such as that of the 33 miners who were rescued in the Atacama Desert, in Chile, in October 2010, and shown live on television around the world. In today's sickly commodified culture, it is not in the least odd to admit that we may be about to witness a tourism marketing campaign exploiting the San José drama and the ironic transformation of the mines into one of those sites that boast a mixture of rejoicing and the memory of horror. One should not be surprised if, in such a scenario, a real or virtual tour were offered in the rescue capsule that descended 700 feet into the mine, accompanied by *in vivo* and *in situ* accounts recited to tourists by the miners themselves or their families, with due praise to the human skills and community solidarity evinced there during the dramatic 69-day occurrence.<sup>8</sup> After all, isn't this one of the latest and most appreciated heritages of humankind? Isn't it one of the most *authentic* documents of reality and of tenacious human resilience, witnessed live by millions

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<sup>8</sup> Let it be recalled that on 5 August 2010, a landslide in the San José mine, in the Atacama Desert, left 33 miners trapped in a gallery. After 17 days of drilling, the rescue teams were finally able to make contact with the group. There followed a painstaking, highly challenging rescue operation, originally scheduled to last up to four months. On October 13, after 69 days of confinement, all 33 miners were rescued alive, amidst ecstatic media coverage which had all the trappings of a political marketing campaign.

of human beings? Wasn't it a case of huge collective enthusiasm over the effectiveness and benefits of science and technology placed at the service of the community, and to such a happy outcome? Isn't this the narrative that today's society, faced with all kinds of challenges and seemingly insoluble crises, wishes to pass on to the future as both a token and a legacy of past experiences?

To this list of unexpected tourist possibilities one might add the growing importance of tourist experiences in unveiling the geographies of destitution. Slums, townships and *favelas* are at the mercy of the unbridled voyeurism that is being fostered all over the global South these days, as shown by a number of recent studies (Sarmiento and Brito-Henriques, 2013). In this respect, the global South is becoming a showcase for the multiple repertoires of everyday precariousness and sheer *survivalism* the poor experience as a way of life. *Touring poverty* – that is perhaps the formula that best encapsulates the perverse encroachment on bits and pieces of the lives of others. In more or less staged and inauthentic fashion, these fragments of lives are promoted and sold in “packages” and on websites of numberless tourist agencies to affluent, prospective visitors and consumers. Their strategy rests on the exploitation and consumption of experiences, which is the new philosophy of international, post-cultural “reality tourism.” Touring poverty – an experience that, in the words of Thope Lekau, illustrates how “one man’s destitution is another man’s adventure”<sup>9</sup> – eloquently sums up the new tourism and the way in which it is driven by otherness and social difference, rather than by historical or cultural difference. This is a modality of tourist consumption that paradoxically sees poverty as “a generator of wealth” for the benefit of promoting agents and a variety of informal schemes (Sharp, 2009: 94-97). It remains to be seen whether otherness and social difference, now at the mercy of tourism’s inner logic and once they have been turned into commodities for elite consumption, will be able – and if so, how – to create mechanisms for the sociopolitical empowerment and emancipation of both the individuals and the communities now being targeted by this intrusive, tourist “gaze”. On the other hand, given what this experience entails in terms of border-crossing and cultural face-off, we also wonder whether it may not bring with it some momentary pause and allow for the rethinking and recontextualization of a world torn by violent dialogical relations.

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<sup>9</sup> Thope Lekau, the owner of an inn located in Khayelitsha, a township in the outskirts of Capetown, is quoted by Bianca Freire-Medeiros, in a paper devoted to the analysis of this modern type of touristic exoticism (Freire-Medeiros, 2010).

What I think should be stressed, to sum up these thoughts on the seduction/emotion generated by monuments and how they relate to memory, whether we speak of dark tourism or touring poverty, is the need to identify cultural heritage as an uneven bargaining arena and a meeting point where a false consensus among socially contested meanings is forged. Emotion, as I have tried to show, is certainly one of the ingredients of that negotiation.

### **Coda**

If, as I mentioned earlier, we now live in a world of manifest political and classificatory uncertainty, it is equally obvious that we should find it very difficult to define what heritage is or isn't. I even grant that only through democracy will we be able to find the terms of a general consensus on the concepts and players involved in the classification, at once technical and popular, of what constitutes one's heritage and its political meaning. There is no consensus among the experts to begin with, but then neither do the latter see eye to eye with the public that stands to gain from the protection and enhancement of heritage. I believe that when we speak of a culture of excessive patrimonialization, i.e., of how heritage has been blown out of proportion, or when we expose the slack criteria that allow for the classification of too many items as heritage, the thing being questioned, to a large extent, is precisely this difficulty in establishing socially negotiated criteria, through a democratic, truly open exchange of arguments and full transparency of meanings. When no robust criteria are in place, meanings fail to be negotiated. And this, in turn, has often led to undesirable situations where many monuments and other cultural marks rose to heritage status in the same manner that "art" became "culture" or culture came to be indistinguishable from spectacle.

By way of conclusion I wish to emphasize, with regard to the uneven nature of the criteria used for classifying objects, places and social practices as heritage and their tourist use, the political import of these classificatory exercises, which are also an indication of the uncertain nature of our present.

I find a clear illustration of this in the very evolution of the concept of heritage as a result of the actions and policies aimed at asserting identities and in the emergence of "new" particularistic interests. A case in point is the saga around the uses, by early twentieth century experts in natural history, of the dissected body of a Botswana warrior who died in

1830. After being exhumed and embalmed, the warrior's body was brought to Paris by two French naturalists, the Verreaux brothers – Jules Edouard and Pierre – who put it on public display until it was sold to Francesc Darder, a Catalan naturalist. Darder included the warrior's body in the personal collection that was to be the nucleus of the Darder Museum of Natural History, which he himself established in Banyoles, near Barcelona. The African warrior's body remained on display there from 1916 to 1997, when a decision was finally reached with regard to the complaint presented in 1991 by Alphonse Arcelin, a Haitian physician, who claimed that it was both ethically offensive and morally intolerable to keep the young man's body on exhibit. The issue rose to international prominence, and in 1997 the town of Banyoles was forced to order the removal of the mummified body, which was later reburied in the warrior's native soil (Bagué, 2000: 88).

This story serves to prove the changing, disputed meaning of heritage. The dissected body was regarded as heritage as long as the prevailing notions of civilization and science were those legitimized by the political and scientific practice of colonialism. But in a historical context of globalization and respect for cultural diversity, which is also a context of scientific relativism, the public display of the body in question was reinterpreted as an obscene, racist provocation, thus losing all its previous legitimacy as heritage.

The lesson to be gleaned from this incident is that heritage is always a selection and a choice, its meaning being a value that is attributed through sociocultural negotiation. Therefore it is the result of reflective social action, which may express itself in either a technical or an indirect manner. In its technical manifestation, the attribution of value derives from the judgment of experts and follows academic, technical and scientific principles. When reflectivity expresses itself indirectly, on the other hand, technical and scientific considerations yield to judgments born out of more spontaneous, popular – although no less legitimate – social views.

The various cultural associations, social movements, social platforms and networks devoted to the defense and protection of heritage, which have mushroomed around the world in recent years, are a clear demonstration of the increasing importance of such indirect social reflectivity. No only do they demand that positions be adopted with respect to cultural goods that were previously deemed of marginal technical and scientific value, but they also devote themselves to the certification of the cultural value of those goods. An extremely difficult task, to be sure, for whoever has to deal with classifications and with



meaningful narratives about objects that are displayed in museums, especially in ethnographic museums where the presence of postcolonial narratives makes itself more or less felt (Sharp, 2009: 94-97).

Therefore, and to conclude, for something in a plural society to be regarded as heritage there must exist social subjects from a variety of backgrounds and political-ideological inclinations. Another determining factor is the position those subjects occupy in the social structure, and, not least, the general ability and readiness to both acknowledge and embrace the cultural goods of others – whether other groups, other social times, or those other places with which we share this existence of ours in the troubled world of contemporary culture.

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