

Alena Pfoser

Hilary Orange, ed. *Reanimating Industrial Spaces: Conducting Memory Work in Post-Industrial Societies*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2015. 280 pp. ISBN 978-1-61132-168-5.

Alena Pfoser. Address for correspondence: Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU, UK. A.Pfoser2@lboro.ac.uk.

The edited volume *Reanimating Industrial Spaces: Conducting Memory Work in Post-Industrial Societies*, which developed out of two panels at conferences of the Theoretical Archaeology Group and the European Association of Archaeologists, examines the varied afterlives of industrial sites after the abandonment of active production. Deindustrialization has radically transformed places and their communities and led to economic degeneration, material decay, and unemployment, with 22 million jobs lost between 1969 and 1976 in the United States alone. While often overlooked or regarded as useless wastelands, in the past decade industrial ruins have attracted an increasing number of scholars, artists, and urban explorers, leading to what Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor see as an “extraordinary intensification of academic and popular interest in the ruins of the recent past and associated realms of dereliction” (2013:465). Written mostly by archaeologists working on case studies in the United States, United Kingdom, Albania, and Uganda, among other places, the volume contributes to this literature by providing a global perspective on how these sites of former industrial production are reshaped and “reanimated” in the present. The notion of “reanimation” in the volume’s title is not primarily linked to urban regeneration and the making of official heritage but refers to something more fundamental: the processes through which these places are repurposed, lived in, and invested with (shifting) meanings through the processes of remembering and forgetting—a concern it shares with previously published monographs by Tim Edensor (2005), Steven C. High and David W. Lewis (2007), and Alice Mah (2012). As Hilary Orange outlines in the introduction, the authors of the volume were given four questions to examine: “What is the relationship between industrial heritage and memory? How is memory involved in the process of placemaking in regards to industrial spaces? What are the strengths and pitfalls of conducting memory work? What can be learned from cross-disciplinary perspectives and methods?” (14)

The volume’s 12 chapters introduce case studies from different parts of the world. The first two chapters focus on official heritage sites and discourses. Paul Belford explores the potential of (public) archaeology for reanimating the past, arguing that archaeology can offer a messier, livelier way of engaging with industrial heritage than traditional preservation strategies by engaging audiences and offering detailed and multiple interpretations of the past. The following chapter by Peter Oakley offers a critical interrogation of official reanimation strategies in the heritage sector drawing on three Alaskan mining sites.

The largest part of the book is, however, less concerned with official heritage discourse but foregrounds more informal and transient forms of heritage and memories. The chapters by Bradley L. Garrett and Jeffrey Benjamin analyze how urban explorers and sound artists engage with industrial spaces and “other people’s pasts” and discuss the potential of creative explorations as practices of honoring of the past. The subsequent contributions examine memories of everyday life and work from the perspective of (former) inhabitants of industrial spaces. Emily Glass and Louise Iles discuss how encounters with social memories during their archaeological field trips in Albania and Uganda enriched their understandings of industrial production. Gabriel Moshenska offers an interesting account of school gas chambers and air raid shelters in WWII Britain, the result of one of Britain’s largest construction programs that was used to both protect and discipline children. Sam R. Sweitz’s oral history study explores workers’ memories of a former sugar mill in Puerto Rico and asks if memories of past self-efficacy could translate into empowerment and activism in the present. Hilary Orange and Lisa J. Hill examine the fragmentedness of memory in their chapters on the British mining landscape. While Orange focuses on the re-drawing of community boundaries in memories of the recent past, Hill’s chapter is an evocative examination of its hauntedness. She takes the reader on a walk along an old miner’s path through a postindustrial landscape in rural England. The industrial landscape emerges as an uncertain, at times disorienting mnemonic terrain; the childhood memories of her guide interweave with older memories of work and war linked to the place. The last, only loosely connected chapter by Caradoc Peters and Adam P. Spring discusses digital representation technologies and their potential for preserving the industrial past.

While the quality and originality of the individual chapters vary, the volume demonstrates some interesting and varied routes for examining the afterlife of industrial spaces through oral history, archaeological excavations, walking, and artistic practices. Read together, it is particularly the liveliness of memory and the pluritemporality of former industrial spaces as well as the consideration of the materiality of industrial spaces that stand out and make the volume an interesting read. Beyond more “traditional” scholarly concerns over official heritage discourses, the commodification, and authenticity that have shaped literature on industrial heritage, the authors analyze industrial spaces and their materialities as multivocal spaces that are shaped by different experiential and temporal layers. Furthermore, many readers will find the wide geographical scope a significant strength of the volume. By including, among other sites, case studies from Uganda, Costa Rica, and Albania, the volume widens the scope of study beyond the traditional focus on Western Europe and the United States. However, the diversity of the case study methodologies and their geographical contexts also has a downside: it leads to fragmentation. While heterogeneity can be intriguing and Paul Graves-Brown in his conclusion makes some effort in establishing links between the chapters, a stronger introduction and some subsections would have helped the reader to contextualize national and local patterns and gain a more systematic picture of the dynamics of memory in/of (industrial) places.

Even more significant is the lack of engagement with the concept of memory and memory work; in particular those readers who, like the reviewer (a cultural sociologist and scholar of memory), read the book from the perspective of memory studies and hope for broader theoretical discussions will be disappointed. Despite being characterized as a “cross-disciplinary” undertaking, the book is written mainly by archaeologists and primarily positioned in relation to disciplinary discussions in archaeology—in particular discussions on industrial archaeology and historical archaeology. Although discussions on the relations of memory and the material landscape, the hauntedness of places, and the relations between official heritage and vernacular memories will speak to a broader audience interested in memory, heritage, and industrial landscapes, the authors and editor miss the chance to position their findings within current debates in the field of memory studies. As memory and memory work play a significant role in the book, it is surprising that these concepts are not sufficiently theorized. Beyond the works of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Tim Edensor, there are hardly any references to memory studies, and discussions on the relations between past and present, the multidirectional character of memory, postmemory, memory and imagination, and the nature of nostalgia, which directly speak to the book’s concerns, are not taken into consideration.

A final remark has to be made about the use of the images. All chapters in the book are accompanied by photographic documentation showing industrial spaces and agents of memory, including the authors during their fieldwork. What is missing however is a discussion on the selection of images and the relationship between the visual and nonvisual, particularly in the context of recent critical engagement with the politics of representation in ruin photography. Although several chapters explicitly draw attention to the nonrepresentational character of industrial spaces (by Garrett, Hill, Benjamin), the book does not make use of its potential to add to the critical debate on the aestheticization of ruins.

REFERENCES

- DeSilvey, Caitlin, and Tim Edensor. 2013. “Reckoning with Ruins.” *Progress in Human Geography* 37(4):465–485.
- Edensor, Tim. 2005. *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*. Oxford: Berg.
- High, Steven C., and David W. Lewis. 2007. *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Mah, Alice. 2012. *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.