

MUSEUMS AND THE WORKING CLASS

EDITED BY
ADELE CHYNOWETH

MUSEUM MEANINGS

MUSEUMS AND THE WORKING CLASS

Museums and the Working Class is the first book to take an intersectional and international approach to the issues of economic diversity and class within the field of museum studies.

Bringing together 16 contributors from eight countries, this book has emerged from the significant global dialogue concerning museums' obligation to be inclusive, participate in meaningful engagement and advocate for social change. As part of the push for museums to be more accessible and inclusive, museums have been challenged to critically examine their power relationships and how these are played out in what they collect, whose stories they exhibit and who is made to feel welcome in their halls. This volume will further this professional and academic debate through the discussion of class. Contributions to the book will also reinforce the importance of the working class – not only in collection and exhibition policy, but also for the organisational psychology of institutions.

Museums and the Working Class is essential reading for scholars and students of museum, gallery and heritage studies, cultural studies, sociology, labour studies and history. It will also serve as a source of honest and research-led inspiration to practitioners working in museums, galleries, libraries, archives and at heritage sites around the world.

Adele Chynoweth has earned her living as a shop assistant, cabaret performer, night club DJ, call centre operator, union organiser, public servant, and teacher in secondary schools and adult vocational education. Adele also studied theatre direction at the Flinders University Drama Centre and completed her PhD with scholarship support. Adele was a Lecturer in the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies at the Australian National University where she received the Vice Chancellor's Award for Public Policy and Outreach in 2018. In 2020, she was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia.

MUSEUM MEANINGS

Series Editors: Richard Sandell and Christina Kreps

Museums have undergone enormous changes in recent decades; an ongoing process of renewal and transformation bringing with it changes in priority, practice and role as well as new expectations, philosophies, imperatives and tensions that continue to attract attention from those working in, and drawing upon, wide ranging disciplines.

Museum Meanings presents new research that explores diverse aspects of the shifting social, cultural and political significance of museums and their agency beyond, as well as within, the cultural sphere. Interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and international perspectives and empirical investigation are brought to bear on the exploration of museums' relationships with their various publics (and analysis of the ways in which museums shape – and are shaped by – such interactions).

Theoretical perspectives might be drawn from anthropology, cultural studies, art and art history, learning and communication, media studies, architecture and design and material culture studies amongst others. Museums are understood very broadly – to include art galleries, historic sites and other cultural heritage institutions – as are their relationships with diverse constituencies.

The focus on the relationship of the museum to its publics shifts the emphasis from objects and collections and the study of museums as text, to studies grounded in the analysis of bodies and sites; identities and communities; ethics, moralities and politics.

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They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there.
You'll either be a union man
Or a thug for J.H. Blair.

Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

Oh, workers can you stand it?
Oh, tell me how you can?
Will you be a lousy scab
Or will you be a man?

Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

Don't scab for the bosses
Don't listen to their lies
Us poor folks haven't got a chance
Unless we organise

Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

Florence Reece, 1931

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I grew up in a working-class family in South Australia and became accustomed to external exclusivity. But the capacity to link these experiences to those of others and to a wider socio-political understanding has been supported by many conversations, reading, formal events and networks from my school years and beyond. I am still learning. My rationale for this volume has been nurtured, whether they knew it or not, by Paul Ashton, Richard Benjamin, David Fleming, Françoise McClafferty, Susana Meden, Philip Payton, Jill Sheppard, Laurajane Smith, Jacqueline Z. Wilson, Kerry Wilson and fellow members of the National Tertiary Education Union.

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We are stronger together.

INTRODUCTION

'Which side are you on'? Towards meaningful attention to class in museums

Adele Chynoweth

This volume advocates for a conscious and dedicated awareness, and accompanying practice, of the importance of class in informing the work of all museums. Paying attention to working and poverty classes must not be at the expense of, or instead of, equity in relation to other marginalised characteristics. Instead, class should be understood as a discursive thread that links a range of equity groups and democratic imperatives. The term 'working class' may be somewhat misleading. It is difficult to defend a notion of a single, unified working class, but then again, perhaps it always was. The working class has always been enriched by a diversity of identities. Further, the socio-economic landscape is complex and the study of social class has evolved, but this does not mean that the issue of class is irrelevant. For the purposes of this book, the term 'museums' largely refers to the wider 'GLAM' sector: galleries, libraries, archives and museums. In addition, the policies that inform the conservation, representation and public engagement at heritage sites also have significant implications for the working classes and hence are also included in this volume.

Defining class

Australian scholars Jill Sheppard and Nicholas Biddle identify three waves of social class research. The first is informed by Marx and is largely theoretical, focusing on 'labour, capital, and political power' in class formation and inter-class dynamics,¹ in other words, a theory of social relations within a hierarchy of groups. The second wave, known as the 'Goldthorpe schema' based in sociological theory, concentrates on status of employment. The third wave of social class research is influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of class, which consists of three forms of capital – social, cultural and economic.² It is here, through this sociological discussion, that the notion of taste is linked with social groups.³ As a

result of these scholarly developments, the traditional class categories of 'working', 'middle' and 'upper' class have been revised and broadened. Labour economist Guy Standing identifies several class groups in current existence, among them the 'old' working class and the precariat.⁴ Mick Savage et al. also identify seven social classes in Britain today, including the traditional working class, emergent service workers and the precariat.⁵ While Australia has prided itself on its 'absence of visible class signifiers',⁶ Sheppard and Biddle recognise six classes in Australia, and assert that the study of class is important and relevant.⁷ Among them is the precariat class, which has emerged from global capitalism and austerity measures. The precariat endures insecure employment and debt as well as a lack of belonging, and is diverse and divided. The precariat is the migrant worker, the single mother, the teenager in the internet café, the backpacker, the environmental activist, for example, and what they all have in common is that 'labour is instrumental (to live), opportunistic (taking what comes) and precarious (insecure)'.⁸

One of the problems with the contemporary discourse of social class is that the term 'class' is often eradicated. Sheppard and Biddle note, 'researchers now commonly talk about intergenerational mobility, social cohesion, social capital, and entrenched disadvantage: each an important concept on its own. However, ... objective and subjective measures of social class are still very much present in Australian society'.⁹ Media scholars Tony Moore, Mark Gibson and Catharine Lumby also note the absence of class in Australian policy discourse, in politics and in academic scholarship and advocate for class to be viewed as culture and not merely as 'socio-economic categories' that negatively stigmatise low-income communities by labelling them as 'disadvantaged'.¹⁰ The Australian Government's Department for Education, Skills and Employment includes 'low socioeconomic status' in its equity groups as part of its higher education policy but this is addressed in the absence of the terminology of class.¹¹ David Fleming in his chapter in this volume also notes that the UK's occupation-based National Statistics Socio-economic Classification superficially serves a 'society [that] continues to strive to classify people for marketing purposes'.

Current discussions emphasising the discourse of class is also evident beyond English-speaking countries. The Association of Indian Labour Historians was founded in New Delhi in 1996. Since the late-1970s, the History Workshop movement throughout South Africa reveals a strong emphasis on labour history and the working classes. The 'Mundos do Trabalho' (Worlds of Labour) was established as part of Brazil's Associação Nacional de História in 2000. There is also the Pakistan Institute for Labour Education and Research (PILER). These are responses by labour historians who know that the working classes are growing¹² and not 'extinct' at all. But, of course, discussions concerning the working and poverty classes are not confined to the discipline of history, and in relation to museology, the discourse of class has implications for *all* genres of museums, beyond social history to natural history, science, technology and industry.

A broad social justice framework

This volume does not position the discourse of class as an isolated issue for museums. Paying attention to class need not, and should not, be at the expense of other predicaments that have implications for the museum sector such as climate change, threats to democracy, (de)colonisation, displacement and social disconnection.¹³ In 2009, Robert R. Janes noted that museums were rarely mentioned in the literature that warned about climate change, which exemplified for him how museums had become irrelevant as 'social institutions'.¹⁴ In 2017, Newell et al. asked 'how can museums collaborate in building communities able to engage with and respond to climate change?'¹⁵ They also note how, recently, museums have exhibited climate change and the emergence of museums devoted to climate change.¹⁶

Attention has been drawn to an epistemic crisis, exemplified by the work of the RAND Corporation, a US not-for-profit research organisation, that applies the term 'truth decay' to its identification of 'heightened disagreement about facts' and the 'blurred line between opinion and fact' as threats to democracy.¹⁷ This global democracy recession is also characterised by 'a steep rise in far-right nationalism',¹⁸ and power-sharing democracies being replaced by governments comprising leaders who are 'masters of deception and seduction'.¹⁹ Some political scholars may debate the existence of this democratic recession²⁰ while its ramifications echo through the museum and heritage sectors. American sociologist Norman K. Denzin asks in relation to the failure of the United States' Bush administration to stop the destruction of museums in Iraq, 'Is this what American democracy stands for?... With the death of culture in Iraq comes violence and a new American enemy, one of our making'.²¹ In relation to knowledge, museums aim to be more participatory and this in turn means that 'visitors are more and more able to question the curators' truths'.²² However, this does not relinquish the museum's role in providing necessary information: 'Simply inviting the visitor to state opinions based on the same knowledge as entering the museum makes no one smarter'.²³ Arts sector commentators Janet Marstine and Svetlana Mintcheva draw attention to the 'tightening of cultural controls in authoritarian regimes' to support their assertion that 'developing curatorial agency to negotiate self-censorship has particular urgency'.²⁴

Our society is also experiencing a critical loneliness epidemic, which has serious, negative impacts on physical and mental health.²⁵ Research has indicated that, whether intended or not, museums have an important function in facilitating social interaction.²⁶ Given the social role of museums, there is a clear mandate for the sector to be positively address severe community disconnection. The heritage and museum sectors have also sought to understand and reveal the significance of LGBTQ+ narratives, exemplified by the *Prejudice and Pride* which explores this living history in places owned by the National Trust (UK).²⁷ Museums have also extended their attention to the needs of disabled people beyond a dominant, conventional preoccupation with visitor access or as exhibited 'objects of curiosity' to a meaningful exhibited representation of their narratives, informed by the experiences of the disabled themselves.²⁸ Attention to human remains in museum

collections throughout the world is a social justice imperative demanding respectful and consultative repatriation to Indigenous communities²⁹ or as a means to challenge 'reductive stereotypes' of disabled people.³⁰ Communities have made claims from museums for the repatriation or restitution of objects pertaining to their cultural heritage.³¹

Museum Detox, the UK network of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) museum workers, formed in 2014, confronts racism in museum employment and aims to decolonise museum practice.³² Museum Hue in the United States was founded in 2015 to support and advocate for 'Black, Indigenous and other People of Color'.³³ Museums have also represented the impact of displacement in Holocaust and memory museums, for example.³⁴ However, the cultural sector has also been responsible for the displacement of people. When culture is used to transform sites, the 'effect of regeneration may be to squeeze out poorer residents of communities'.³⁵ The term 'heritage dispossession' is also used to refer to the process of eviction of underprivileged people when certain areas are redeveloped in order to support heritage tourism.³⁶ The intersectional stance of this book³⁷ argues that the understanding and support of diversity and democracy through practice does not excuse the issue of class being ignored or placed on the backburner of the work of any museum or heritage site.

This volume affirms the necessary push for museums to be at the forefront of an activist and socially relevant practice and argues for the working and poverty classes to be granted visible agency in museums. The intersection between class and the cultural sector has been the subject of scholarship evident in Tony Bennett et al.'s *Culture, Class, Distinction* (2009) and the work of Dave O'Brien et al. (2014). In 2003, Bobbie Oliver and Andrew Reeves co-edited a special thematic edition of the international journal *Labor History*, which examined ways in which working life was represented, or not, throughout Australian museums and galleries. This edition includes courageous and substantiated accounts from a range of scholars on examples of exhibited labour history throughout Australia, including descriptions of associated controversies. *Museums and the Working Class* extends this discussion both internationally and beyond the bounds of exhibited representation. Laurajane Smith et al.'s *Heritage, Labour and the Working Classes* (2011) examines how working-class communities and labour organisations use heritage and also identifies where working-class heritage is excluded. This volume includes the heritage sector and expands this discussion to include museums, archives and libraries. Nina Simon's *The Art of Relevance* (2016) and C. A. Scott's (ed.) *Museums and Public Value: Creating Sustainable Futures* (2016) exemplify the international push to make museums relevant to the public. This volume argues the case for the perspectives of the working and poverty classes to be central to this ambition. *Museums and the Working Class* is also inspired by Tony Bennett's research in *The Birth of the Museum* (1995) concerning the emergence of the public museum as a means to reform the behaviour of the working class. How museums still respond to the working classes is central to the purpose of this volume.

While there is extensive literature in which scholars and practitioners from the museum sector observe the imperative quest for diversity, such declarations co-exist with current sociological commentary. For example, Owen Jones' *Chavs* (2011)

and Matt Wray's *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (2006) note the contempt for certain constructed sub-groups within the working class. Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale's co-edited volume *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (2012) includes a chapter by British journalist and academic Gary Younge, 'The Margins and the Mainstream', in which he draws attention to the importance of nuancing in identity politics. For example, he notes:

One of the problems with diversity, as currently understood, is that it can often take precious little account of economic difference – an omission that leaves the white working class stranded without a sponsor. In the world of multi-culturalism, as it is often portrayed, they are assumed to have no culture. They are told their whiteness is a mark of power they have never felt and a signifier for potential bigotry they may not harbour. Caught in a pincer between the battle for scarce resources and the battle for equality, the white working class might then feel concerned – forced to argue not for more resources but against 'others' getting their cut. Under those conditions they experience their race and class not as interlocking identities but as a besieged grievance which the Right are only too happy to leverage for political gain.³⁸

Museums and the Working Class continues, applies and extends discussions concerning the cultural sector to serve to ensure that the working class and the diversity throughout are not left behind.

Class-based prejudice

Any quest to extend museum inclusion to the working and poverty classes is, to put it euphemistically, a 'challenge'. This push is positioned against a wider societal backdrop characterised by elitist identity trends that are driving a wedge through the working and poverty classes, dividing them into deserving and undeserving sub-groups. The construction and demonisation of a white working class is an apt example. It denotes a false class because the working and poverty classes are culturally diverse and yet derogatory terms such as 'chavs', 'scum', 'chav scum', 'white trash', 'trailer trash' or 'bogans', in everyday conversation, are unlikely to be challenged and serve to reinforce elitism and associated privileged notions of good taste.³⁹ Television programming includes 'poverty porn', unsympathetic voyeuristic television portraits of those cast as the undeserving poor,⁴⁰ evident in *Skint* and *Benefits Street* on Channel 4 in the UK⁴¹ and *Struggle Street* in Australia. The abuse of those living in poverty is acceptable in ways that would not be tolerated for other marginalised groups.⁴² Lynsey Hanley notes, "'Chavscum.co.uk", a website hosting reams of virulent abuse against the "undeserving poor", would be shut down immediately if the same dehumanizing language were to be directed at people of another colour or different religion. But because its targets are merely of another class, we can log on and have a good laugh'.⁴³ Constructing a white working class as separate from their diverse colleagues and then insulting them is

justified on the basis that it is a defence against bigotry and racism⁴⁴ but it may be argued that such validation is an attempt at disguising snobbery. British journalist Johann Hari states, 'It's one of the ways people have made their snobbery socially acceptable... by acting as though they are defending immigrants from the "ignorant" white working class'.⁴⁵

In Australia, it wasn't all that long ago that working-class culture was celebrated. In the 1980s, former rigger Paul Hogan as Crocodile Dundee as well as the bands AC/DC and Cold Chisel were not only applauded but identified as crucial cultural contributions. Now, the notion of class is largely absent in Australian policy discourse, politics and academic scholarship.⁴⁶ The Hawke and Keating Governments in Australia addressed ethnic and cultural diversity in their social policies but none of the categories were based on income.⁴⁷ Academic scholarship, too, turned away from the discourse of class at the end of the 1980s, fuelled by the need to address inequity in the areas of 'gender, sexuality, ethnicity, indigeneity and disability' and informed by a refocus in cultural studies. This pluralism in understanding diversity was an imperative in Australia. Moore et al. note 'the urgency of political questions around multiculturalism, indigeneity and postcolonialism, and because of the way in which new intellectual formations of the 1970s and 1980s [that] came to be associated with a distinctive "Australian" style of work... Australian cultural studies never had a "class moment"'.⁴⁸ This constellation of diversity resulted in the marginalisation of class from academic discourse⁴⁹ and in turn, from the work of the Australian museum sector. This book argues for diversity in the museum and heritage sectors to include attention to the poverty and working classes as a conscious discourse and meaningful approach.

It is too easy for museums to romanticise the working class through limiting their representation in the past – those sepia-toned images, as Michelle McGrath describes in Chapter 12, 'of men up north [UK] in the 1960s with their flat caps doing heavy labour in the mining industry'. Such exhibited photographs can be a means to disengage visitors from current struggles. While traipsing through a house museum, we may also catch sight of a cornered mannequin, inanimate beneath a mop cap, apron and vacant stare. Displays of trade union banners are an apt reminder of past struggle. Yet, too, these faded icons with unravelling tassels seemingly symbolise the loosening of a tight fist that previously gripped them. A glass display case both imposes a restrained stillness that negates the movement of the march that once impelled it and reduces the *mise-en-scène* to that of a constructed mausoleum for passers-by to mourn as if a proud working-class movement is dead.

Paying meaningful, multi-discursive attention to class with contemporary relevance is far from inconceivable. The HumanKind project at Calke Abbey, National Trust (UK), for example, comprises a series of installations that link site-based historical narratives with the current loneliness and includes the story of Harriet Phillip, a domestic servant and unwed mother who could not read or write.⁵⁰ This volume shares other examples and, conversely, where opportunities to pay attention to the working and poverty classes are ignored, or more regrettably, where the working class is disparaged. It is not unusual for the working or poverty classes to be attacked.⁵¹

Working class habits are scrutinised through a range of responses, including the subtlety of the 'inspecting gaze',⁵² commonly understood as 'looking down their nose'. In order to draw attention to such disapproval, the titles of each section of this book reference the language and associated contempt. Part I of this volume, 'Shut out', concerns challenges to those museums and archives whose practices prevent access to the working class. Part II, 'Shut up', addresses the exclusion of class-based narratives and policies in museums. Part III, 'Know your place', considers the responses at heritage sites. Part IV, 'Answering back', illustrates how the experiences of the working and poverty classes can enhance the work of the museum and, in turn, the wider community.

Class matters arising

Classless multiculturalism

This volume identifies key areas in which class matters require attention. Through its intersectional stance, it refutes any classless multiculturalism that may dominate the methodology of museum and heritage sectors in their attempt to be diverse and inclusive. In Chapter 10, I acknowledge, as part of my overall analysis of the \$18 million refurbishment of the Hyde Park Barracks Museum in Sydney, Australia, the commitment by senior museum staff to promote reconciliation with the First Peoples of Australia. This obligation is realised in the Museum's exhibition module concerning the Myall Creek Massacre in 1838, interpreted through a superficial binary of race relations, without consideration of class analysis. As a result, the necessary condemnation of the perpetrators was confined to 'white' convicts, excluding the privileged free settler who was the ringleader and a British Jamaican convict who were also responsible for the mass murder.⁵³

In Chapter 6, Paolo Magagnoli presents a comparative analysis of two photographic exhibitions at the State Library of Queensland, Australia, including *Plantation Voices*, which told 'the story of the South Sea Islanders who were forcefully brought to Queensland in the mid-nineteenth century to work as indentured labour for cotton and sugar cane plantations' through 'a "culturalist" notion of recognition'. Magagnoli reasons that this limiting interpretative lens disavowed the economic struggles of this group that endure in the present. The much-needed representation of this crucial analysis, Magagnoli explains, could have been fulfilled if 'the exhibition's conceptual framework had included the notion of class'.

In Chapter 15, anthropologist Diana James analyses the controversy in 2014 of the *Ngintaka Exhibition* fuelled by the powerful Murdoch Press resulting in Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara traditional owners gathering outside the South Australian Museum in Adelaide to protest the proposed closure of the exhibition. James makes the case for the discourse of class, as well as race, to be brought to the understanding of the dynamics of privilege that dominate the commodification of modern Aboriginal art in the western fine art market and in the positioning of 'experts' who influence 'the national cultural narratives of museums, universities,

literature and the media'. Further, James challenges white, western- dominated notions of 'work' through her emphasis on the importance of 'Aboriginal traditional work that is generated by and sustains living on country'.⁵⁴

Absent presence

The notion of 'absent presence' is a recurring motif in this volume: an application of Derrida's discussion that nothing exists beyond the text.⁵⁵ In the museum and heritage sectors, the text exists in the representation of displays, exhibitions, collections, conservation – what is kept, exhibited, conserved, refurbished and who visits these sites and who is employed to work in them. There is meaning in the omissions of curatorial and heritage work because these gaps contain the traces of the missing. In Chapter 11, in their analysis of the SEKA Paper Museum in Izmit, Turkey, authors Meral Akbaş and Özge Kelekçi note the absence of factory workers and the cacophony of machines that have all been rendered silent. Rabia Nadir, in Chapter 8, draws attention to the Walled City of Lahore in Pakistan, which is being redeveloped for the purposes of global tourism. This heritage policy threatens the rights of poor residents to inhabit 'prime, urban land' and, in turn, their means to livelihood.

This volume pays attention to working-class narratives that have been overlooked. In Chapter 4, Philip Payton writes a compelling case for the need for the museum sector to recognise South Australia's Labor movement, led by the emigrant Cornish mining community. While this history has been acknowledged by UNESCO World Heritage, this international recognition has not been mirrored by the National Museum of Australia or in any of the museums operated by the History Trust of South Australia. Such visibility should not confine working-class struggle to the past. In Chapter 9, Wesley R. Bishop evaluates the collegial action of academics, labour leaders and other members of the community that saved the family home of US socialist politician Eugene Victor Debs from demolition in 1962. Bishop argues that the public history associated with Debs should be confrontative, where past struggles are connected with the present. This volume also echoes the observation of Amy K. Levin in her discussion concerning museums, sexuality and gender, that 'the recognition of women in museums is not old news'.⁵⁶ In Chapter 7, José Manuel Vázquez Lijó, director of the Marea Museum, which opened in 2012 in Porto do Son in the northwest of Spain, discusses his work in redressing the invisibility of women workers in the history of Galicia's maritime industry.

Hands on

The notion of absence in this volume does not only concern exhibited representation museums or redevelopment within the heritage sector. Paying attention to class means not only acknowledging content and narratives but also aesthetics and the mode of representation itself. Here, the volume contributes to critical discussions concerning museums and the attention economy. The latter term refers to

human attention being cast as a 'quantifiable commodity', the cornerstone of operations for the marketplace of art and objects.⁵⁷ This mode of consumption is central to the conventional museum. Alternatively, there have been considerations concerning how museums may be places of useful activity – not places of mere participatory events but as a source of essential contribution to everyday life.⁵⁸ There is criticism of the prescription of Ritalin to children who are not suited to the passive pedagogy of the bourgeois classroom.⁵⁹ In a working-class livelihood, characterised by making and repairing, lies a rich source of instruction for any museum or heritage site that wishes to revise its privileged emphasis on the commodified gaze.

The quest for the useful museum can be traced back to the birth of the public museum itself, which was developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in order to reform and civilise the behaviour of the 'working-class man'.⁶⁰ In Chapter 1, Alexander Scott relates the challenge from new museum visitors to the bourgeois expectation of passive observation. In 1870, the curator of Liverpool's new public museum reported to the museum committee the 'inconvenience' caused by 'young people' who used evening visits to socialise instead of viewing objects. Scott also recounts a poignant and successful plea by an Irish family against the prohibition on touching objects.

Public museums were established and opened their doors in the hope that, as Tony Bennett notes, 'the rough and raucous might learn to civilize themselves'.⁶¹ Their status as 'instruments of state power' (to borrow Alexander Scott's phrase from his chapter) prevented the middle class from learning about alternative modes of interactions with visitors and artefacts. In Chapter 2, David Fleming elucidates this ongoing dynamic with his scrutiny of a range of cultural forms which he casts as created from the 'vantage point' of privilege, a position characterised by both fear and ignorance of the working class. Fleming dedicated his leadership in museums to redress this elitism, through dogged dedication amidst a complex policy landscape. The legacy of his commitment to social justice is exemplified in Chapter 14. Here, Kerry Wilson evaluates *House of Memories*, the 'multiple award-winning dementia awareness programme led by National Museums Liverpool (NML) in the UK' and substantiates its success as the result of 'the active process of co-design and production in collaboration with people with dementia and their carers from traditional working-class communities in the city of Liverpool'. Further, Wilson emphasises the power of museum objects 'to stimulate and inspire enhanced communication and connection between carers and people with dementia'. This volume, then, brings a class discourse to current discussions concerning the therapeutic value of museum objects.⁶²

In Chapter 13, Martin Hughes, the manager of the Boatbuilding School at the Scottish Maritime Museum, also notes the capacity of museum-based interaction with objects to change the lives of young people who bear the brunt of inter-generational unemployment and/or struggle with addiction. Here, however, it is these trainee boatbuilders that *create* large seaworthy 'objects' from the ground up. Both Martin Hughes' work and Rabia Nadir's ethnographic analysis of local

artisans in Lahore (Chapter 8) corroborate similar contemporary discussions, which note that while capitalism has resulted in manufacturing jobs being outsourced offshore, localised manual labour is still relevant.⁶³ Moreover, Hughes' and Nadir's contributions to this volume locate this imperative as central to the policies of the museum and heritage sectors. An understanding of the importance of trades is not a mere exercise in nostalgia and, conversely, a disregard for the same is not only an act of snobbery.⁶⁴ Philosopher and mechanic Matthew Crawford states, 'Grime under the fingernails, bodily involvement with the machines we use entails a kind of agency'.⁶⁵

Ethics

This volume also makes the case for extending critical attention to human remains in museum collections so that the remains of those from the working-class deceased are also considered. In Chapter 5, Jamie Jelinski's research reveals the practice of medical practitioners and criminologists who have collected the remains of deceased perpetrators and victims of crime, including tattooed skin from working-class people, which have been collected and displayed by museums. Jelinski exemplifies museum ethical guidelines that include standards for the handling of the human remains from Indigenous communities but excludes principles for the treatment of human remains of other groups such as non-Indigenous, working-class people.

Museums and the Working Class also has implications for how museums conduct 'stakeholder engagement', or, to use a less corporate term: genuine community collaboration. Contributors to this volume reveal their frustrations in their interactions with museums while undertaking their work. Museums may publicly espouse their commitment to research, public engagement, access and inclusion, but in this volume there are personal accounts of museums instituting barriers to scholarly inquiry. Jelinski reports in his chapter that a museum's response to his request for more information about displayed human remains was 'obstructive' and was followed by the Museum's removal of the items from public display only days after his inquiry. In Chapter 3, Silvio Tamasso D'Onofrio recounts his efforts to find a cultural institution to accept his researched and curated collection of material that belonged to Brazilian working-class writer Edgard Cavalheiro. He notes that the governing body of one archival organisation lied to him by saying that they had no space, only later accepting a much larger collection of an internationally famous musician. His autoethnographic analysis prompts his associated hypotheses concerning ubiquity of this elitism throughout the wider archival sector. There is a call through this volume for museums to understand that ethical behaviour is not served by avoidance of issues that may be deemed controversial or challenging but instead may start with honest and authentic interactions with the public.

Employment

Museums are being challenged to critically examine their power relationships and how these are played out in what they collect, whose stories they exhibit and who

is made to feel welcome in their halls,⁶⁶ including who is employed. Sociologists Orian Brook, Dave O'Brien and Mark Taylor have found that the cultural sector is highly inequitable, as evident in who produces and consumes artforms (a minor segment of the population) as well as its precarious and elite workforce. They observe, 'creative jobs are thus highly exclusive. Culture has a class problem. This class problem sits alongside the other, well-known, problems of gender and racial exclusions in cultural and creative occupations'.⁶⁷ David Fleming, in Chapter 2, applies his term 'pattern of privilege' to his analysis of the significant absence of working-class people in British museums, a privilege that is also perpetuated throughout museum governance. In Chapter 12, Michelle McGrath, who describes her origins as 'benefits class', undertook extensive volunteer work in museums, despite her relevant qualifications, before being offered paid employment. Through her establishment of *Museum as Muck*, the UK network of working-class museum professionals, she and her 'Mucker' colleagues collectively apply their lived experience to affect change in the museum sector through running workshops, staging interventions and collecting data to address the disparity inherent in museums' working populations.

This volume does not suggest that *all* museums do not pay *any* meaningful attention to class. There are case studies throughout the following pages that exemplify life-changing engagement. Beyond this text, it is important to note, for example, the extensive work of people's and workers' museums throughout the world, the push from communities to gain a voice in the cultural sector and the organisations that listen. But there are contributors here whose research and lived experience denote struggle of virtually life-denying proportions, relentless toil veiled by invisible prejudice. Such case studies should not be dismissed with platitudinal references to unsubstantiated 'what abouts'. Paying meaningful attention to class involves taking notice of existing research and undertaking more.

The authors have come together through the pages of this volume, in some cases, through an international call for papers. For others, their contributions followed opportune and enriched meetings, through places of work, at international conferences or through social media. One author came to this book following family association through his research. Such networks while vast and relevant are not internationally or culturally even. It is hoped, then, that *Museums and the Working Class* marks an opening for further discussions from countries that are absent in this volume.

'Will you be a lousy scab or...?'

Museums and the Working Class is a manifesto for change through the voices of the working class in exhibitions, collections, conservation policy, community collaboration, programmes, visitor engagement, employment and governance. Florence Reece's father was killed while working in a coal mine in Tennessee. Later, with her husband Sam, also a coal miner, she helped organise miners. The song that Florence wrote, 'Which Side Are You On?' became the anthem of the coal

miner's strike of 1931 in Harlan County, Kentucky.⁶⁸ The song was revived as part of the radical folk song movement in the United States after the Second World War.⁶⁹

The lyrics make it quite clear that there is no neutral position amidst strike action. Anyone who crosses the picket line is, as the song states, a 'scab for the bosses'. Anyone who doesn't support a union's work to organise is a scab. In recent years, we have also been appropriately reminded that throughout the museum sector, there is no neutrality there either.⁷⁰ This volume extends the scab label to those cultural organisations that accept public funds (albeit reduced in many countries), to which workers have contributed through their hard-earned taxes, and yet refuse to pay meaningful attention to their living history. Public museums, since their inception, have promoted their role as the driver of social transformation while perpetuating inequality.⁷¹ Too often, museums drive a divisive wedge between marginalised groups, refuting that class matters and ignoring those who are deemed to have no culture. *Museums and the Working Class* is a manifesto that stands in opposition to such snobbery.

We, the contributors, stand together to ask all museums, archival organisations, libraries and heritage sites throughout the world, that when it comes to class matters:

Which side are you on?

Notes

- 1 Sheppard and Biddle, "Class, Capital, and Identity in Australian Society," 501.
- 2 Sheppard and Biddle, "Class, Capital, and Identity in Australian Society," 502.
- 3 Bennett, "Introduction to the Routledge Classics Edition," xvii.
- 4 • Elite: 'absurdly rich global citizens'
 - Salariats: in 'stable full-time employment'
 - Proficians: a combination of the terms 'professional' and 'technician', referring to those who can market their skills on well-paid contracts.
 - 'Old' working class: industrial labourers
 - Precariat: the unemployed or insecurely employed who distrust the state (Standing, *The Precariat*, 7–9).
- 5 • Elite
 - Established middle class
 - Technical middle class
 - New affluent workers
 - Traditional working class
 - Emergent service workers
 - Precariat (Savage et al., "A New Model of Social Class?," 230).
- 6 Sheppard and Biddle, "Class, Capital, and Identity in Australian Society," 500.
- 7 • Precariat
 - Ageing workers
 - New workers
 - Established middle
 - Emerging affluent
 - Established affluent (Sheppard and Biddle, "Class, Capital, and Identity in Australian Society," 506, 513).
- 8 Standing, *The Precariat*, 15.
- 9 Sheppard and Biddle, "Class, Capital, and Identity in Australian Society," 513.

- 10 Moore et al., "Recovering the Australian Working Class," 218.
- 11 These equity groups comprise non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB), students with a disability, women in non-traditional areas, those who identify as Indigenous, from low SES (socio-economic status) locations based on postcode of permanent home residence and those from regional and remote locations based on postcode of permanent home residence (Australian Government Department for Education, Skills and Employment, 2017 *Section 11 – Equity Groups*).
- 12 van der Linden, "Speaking Globally," 184, 185, 186.
- 13 I am indebted to Richard Hil for several of the following observations, provided in his analytical inventory of the socio-political crises emerging from neoliberalism in his lecture as part of the National Tertiary Education Union's Australian Capital Territory Division Seminar Series 'Matters of Concern', 27 September 2019, The Australian National University.
- 14 Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World*, 26.
- 15 Newell et al., "Introduction," 32.
- 16 Newell et al., "Introduction," 36–37.
- 17 RAND, "Truth Decay."
- 18 Wajid and Minott, "Detoxing and Decolonising Museums," 27.
- 19 Keane, *The New Despotism*, 14.
- 20 For example, Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession"; Levitsky and Way, "The Myth of Democratic Recession."
- 21 Denzin, "The War on Culture," 138–39.
- 22 Rekdal, "Why a Book on Museums and Truth?" xxiii.
- 23 Rekdal, "Why a Book on Museums and Truth?" xxiv.
- 24 Marstine and Mintcheva, "Introduction."
- 25 In 2018, a survey conducted by the Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University of Technology found that one in four Australians feel lonely and 'nearly 30% of Australians rarely or never feel part of a group of friends' and that loneliness is associated with a suite of physical symptoms (*Australian Loneliness Report*, 7, 9, 15). In the UK, the Jo Cox Commission was established in 2017 in order to combat loneliness (Jo Cox Foundation, *Combating Loneliness One Conversation at a Time: A Call to Action*).
- 26 Katifori et al., "Cultivating Mobile-Mediated Social Interaction in the Museum"; Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited*, 171.
- 27 For example, Sandell et al., *Prejudice and Pride*.
- 28 Sandell and Dodd, *Activist Practice*.
- 29 Fforde and Hubert, "Indigenous Human Remains and Changing Museum Ideology," 83–96.
- 30 Sandell et al., "Beggars, Freaks and Heroes?," 17.
- 31 Duthie, "The British Museum"; Whitby-Last, "Legal Impediments to the Repatriation of Cultural Objects to Indigenous Peoples."
- 32 Wajid and Minott, "Detoxing and Decolonising Museums," 27.
- 33 Museum Hue, "About the Founders."
- 34 Lleras et al., "Memory Exercises"; Bernard-Donals, *Figures of Memory*.
- 35 Brook et al., *Culture is Bad for You*, 35.
- 36 Janoschka and Sequera, "Gentrification in Latin America," 1182.
- 37 Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality (1989) aims to assist the acknowledgement of multiple forms of inequality such as race and gender.
- 38 Younge, "The Margins and the Mainstream," 109.
- 39 See Jones, *Chavs*; Newitz and Wray, *White Trash*. The term 'bogan' emerged in the 1980s, considered to have originated in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, Australia (Gibson, "Welcome to Bogan-ville," 63).
- 40 The notion of the 'undeserving poor' dates back to Elizabethan law which served to classify poor people in order to determine 'the limits of our social obligations' (Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 4).
- 41 Jones, *Chavs*, xiv–xv.

- 42 Jones, *Chavs*, 1.
- 43 Hanley, *Estates*, 176.
- 44 Jones, *Chavs*, 8.
- 45 Jones, *Chavs*, 116.
- 46 Moore et al., "Recovering the Australian Working Class," 218.
- 47 Moore et al., "Recovering the Australian Working Class," 221.
- 48 Moore et al., "Recovering the Australian Working Class," 225.
- 49 There were exceptions to this as seen in the scholarship throughout the 1980s and 1990s of Ann Curthoys, Anne Game, Rosemary Pringle, R. W. Connell et al., Marcia Langton, Andrew Jacobowicz, Stephen Castles, Mary Kalantzis et al. and Ghassan Hage who examined how class interacted with 'gendered, ethnic and other identities' (Moore et al., "Recovering the Australian Working Class," 225–26).
- 50 RCMG and National Trust "HumanKind."
- 51 Michell et al., "Introduction," vii.
- 52 Hanley citing Foucault, "Respectable," 45.
- 53 This scapegoating of white, working class people for race-based genocide can be elucidated by philosopher Shannon Sullivan:

'[T]he white desire for innocence is implicated in the middle-class dumping of responsibility for racism on lower- and working-class white people, who are posited as the true source of ongoing racial injustice. Lower-class white people allegedly are the bad white people who are too unintelligent or unenlightened to know that people of color aren't inferior to white people. With their disdain, scorn, and even hatred of lower-class white people, good white liberals often use their guilt and shame to exploit class differences among whites, which allows them to efface their own complicity in white racism and white domination' (Shannon, *Good White People*, 6).
- 54 'Living on country' refers to the 'deep responsibilities' of Aboriginal peoples 'developed over 40,000 years, to live on and care for their traditional Countries. Land connects Aboriginal peoples to their sense of self and wellbeing, and represents part of their identity that has carried through generations' (Mohamed, "Living on Country Represents More than a 'Lifestyle Choice'.")
- 55 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.
- 56 Levin, "Introduction," 17.
- 57 Crogan and Kingsley, "Paying Attention," 1.
- 58 Hudson, "Building a User-Generated Museum."
- 59 Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 73.
- 60 Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 19, 31.
- 61 Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 28.
- 62 Exemplified by Cowan et al., *Museum Objects, Health and Healing*.
- 63 Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 3.
- 64 Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 8, 32.
- 65 Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 63.
- 66 For example, Sandell, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion"; Sandell, *Museums, Society, Inequality*; Sandell and Nightingale (eds), *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*.
- 67 Brook et al., *Culture is Bad for You*, 63.
- 68 Ackley, "In the Footsteps of Mother Jones," 234.
- 69 Weissman, *Which Side Are You On?* 7.
- 70 Autry, "Museums Are Not Neutral"; Fleming, "Do Museums Change Lives?," 74.
- 71 Brook et al., *Culture is Bad for You*, 30.

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