Introduction

In March 2007, in the small deindustrialising town of Morwell in Australia’s south-east, a local group with a post-WWII migrant background launched a public park. In itself, this was not a unique occurrence. The region is dotted with public parks. But this space is unique: the Gippsland Immigration Park was conceived, designed, launched, and managed by locals who seek to commemorate, memorialise, and celebrate migrants and migration to the region of Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley. In Australia’s largely Anglophone heritage landscape, such a community-initiated migrant heritage space warrants attention. As a multiform, open-air space, the Park is a platform etched with many contested and intertwined histories: it engages directly with circulating narratives around industrialisation, migration, and working lives. And it was created in a context familiar to many Western immigrant-receiving nations: in the wake of the privatisation of primary industries and widespread unemployment. As the former coal-fired powerhouse of the state of Victoria and a magnet for migrant workers, the Latrobe Valley was acutely affected by socio-economic changes from the late 1980s. The Park therefore presents a unique opportunity to explore migrant subjectivities in the context of historical change. Given the contradictions of recent politics in self-proclaimed multicultural nation states – and a heated identity politics that draws on essentialist notions of race and ethnicity – as researchers, it is our task to interrogate the spaces and structures that exist for migrant community groups to voice their own histories of immigration and settlement. How do communities remember migrant labour in post-industrial places? The case study of the Gippsland Immigration Park offers a means to unpack the Latrobe Valley’s recent industrial and post-industrial history and to examine the shared and layered community histories of that place in a liberal multicultural nation state. This is both a migrant and an industrial history.

This Element argues that community-initiated migrant heritage harbours the potential to challenge and expand state-sanctioned renderings of multiculturalism in liberal nation states. In this search for alternative readings, community-initiated migrant heritage is positioned as a grassroots challenge to positivist state multiculturalism. It can do this if we adopt the migrant perspective, a diasporic perspective of ‘settlement’ that is always unfinished, non-static, and non-essentialist. As mobile subjects, either once or many times over – a subject position arrived at through acts of mobility, sometimes spawned by violence or structural inequality, which can reverberate throughout subsequent generations – the migrant subject position compels us to look both forwards and backwards in time and place. This is a perspective that can also be mirrored in the migrant subject’s approach to heritage and memory, which are similarly
non-linear, both materially and culturally determined, and manifest in both tangible and intangible ways. Migrants bring unique subjective temporalities to history-making. The aim of this Element is to centre this migrant subjectivity while accounting for the migrant’s institutional and historiographical subjectivation. It consciously reimagines the alternative and even oppositional histories of post-war migration to Australia, as well as migrant and working-class orientations to liberal multiculturalism. The Element draws on the Gippsland Immigration Park as a springboard for such histories and the sociopolitical work that they can do. I read against the grain or search for silences and gaps in the tangible and intangible heritage on display.
What does it mean to centre and explore migrant subjectivity, and what perspective does it offer in this Element? It means adopting, at moments, the viewpoint of individual pasts, presents, and futures and the meaning that one makes from this milieu. It also means privileging ‘ordinary’ storytelling and dispelling empirical or positivist and deterministic understandings of migration history and liberal multiculturalism. In the context of this Element, it also means imagining one (of many) potentially radical subjectivities. The subjective is not universal. In relation to understandings of multiculturalism, it rejects a top-down or institutional approach to the subject matter. Finally, centring migrant subjectivity means turning our critical attention to experience, memory, and emotion as historicised processes. This approach recognises the important role that experience and emotion play in the representation and circulation of collective memories in commemorative contexts.

Adopting the perspective of migrant subjectivity, I argue that migrant (and therefore marginal) heritage processes and constructions have the potential to lay bare the intersectional histories that constitute the collective identity of a place. That is, migrant heritage draws upon memories of displacement, mobility, and settlement that necessarily intersect with changing economic or material conditions. Migrant heritage, approached from the perspective of migrant subjectivity, can also stress the key relationship between labour security and intimate family needs and the historic role of state and institutional structures in shaping daily life. A focus on migrant subjectivity also underlines the central role of emotion and nostalgia in heritage and heritage-making processes. These nostalgic and sometimes ambivalent responses to heritage create possibilities for interpretation that engage with the politics of representation and recognition in multicultural nation states.

The Element, in developing this argument, draws on more than three years of documentary and ethnographic research conducted in Morwell, which has a population of approximately 14,000, and the Latrobe Valley. This included site visits to the Valley and the Park, time spent with local community organisations in their clubhouses and venues, oral history interviews and documentary evidence gathered from the Gippsland Immigration Park Committee and related community groups and local residents, and other primary sources from government bodies investigating heritage, health, environment, and the power industry in the Latrobe Valley. As indicated, my methodology is based on the assumption that knowledge is subjective rather than objective and that an intersectional and sedimented historical approach is required in order to account for how people make meaning from the past.

To offer this local history through a migrant perspective is a productive challenge: it functions as a platform to explore alternative grassroots expressions of multiculturalism from working-class, migrant peoples and to explore their
subjective and emotional engagements with wider-circulating historical narratives about the region and the nation’s past. The inescapable interconnectedness of labour and migration is a key part of retelling and reimagining this public history. Through this mutual inclusivity (of labour and migration), the migrant subject memories espoused at the Park run counter to those that appear in official documentary records and Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) about the region and the nature of its industrial heritage significance.

The Gippsland Immigration Park, as a heritage place, a monument and tribute, a communal meeting point, and an open-air exhibition, is active in the making of local, national, and transnational histories. In reading against the grain or in choosing the settle in the gaps the Park contains, alternative visions of multiculturalisms emerge. The creation and exchange of nostalgic memories of regional community pasts enable transformative possibilities for interpreting the future heritage of this post-industrial place and the role of the migrant subject in it. These alternative readings are worth exploring as examples of the agency of marginalised and marginal voices, highlighting who can or cannot make interventions in well-circulated Australian public histories and official heritage decisions and how they might reveal or conceal past and present inequalities and race-based discriminations.

1 Theoretical and Conceptual Scope

Heritage Studies and Heritage Practice

What I mean by ‘heritage’ in the context of this Element is shaped by approaches prevalent within the field of critical heritage studies, in which heritage is studied as a ‘performative process of meaning making’. As a cultural process and a performance, heritage is not simply a physical fabric, a place, or a thing. To quote Denis Byrne, it ‘comes into being’ as heritage via both ‘the discourse[s] of heritage’ and heritage practices and is therefore always intangible. Of course, cultural heritage can be made manifest in the tangible, but it is only made meaningful through the values and stories people attribute to it. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett summarises this well when she states: ‘tangible heritage, without intangible heritage, is a mere husk or inert matter’.

As Laurajane Smith asserts, an AHD frames the official designation and categorisation of heritage. Professionals, governments, and their policymakers dominate the AHD: at the global level, it is most readily represented in bodies like UNESCO, their various Conventions concerning conservation and protection of ‘the common heritage of humankind’, and the World Heritage List. This discourse of heritage works to legitimise and justify particular historical and social narratives, ones that maintain the status quo and render invisible the struggles of marginalised communities. It operates at the national and local level too: a largely fabric-bound, elitist, and Eurocentric AHD prevails in Australia. This heritage discourse is selective in what it celebrates and what it conceals – the intersecting axes of race, gender, and class are not readily accommodated within this discourse, for example. The AHD renders heritage most visible in its monumental and largely Eurocentric form, as a fabric that can only be properly valued and preserved by those with professional expertise and cultural power. Since the 1990s, many scholars have challenged practitioners to re-evaluate heritage management practices and the nature of top-down interventions and have thus challenged the discursive underpinnings of that system. They have consistently called for more involvement and collaboration with local communities and communities of interest and for heritage professionals and policy-makers to better integrate community uses and understandings of cultural heritage into conservation practices. The official realm of practice, at the international level, responded with the 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Australia has yet to ratify this convention. While a move to consider the ‘intangible’ has had some positive implications for inclusive heritage in Australia – new positions were created for Indigenous traditional owners and consultation became mandatory in many places – there remains the sense that heritage, as a process and discourse, is the reserve of the white-settler cultural majority. Over a decade ago, Waterton and Smith suggested that many heritage projects are done for communities rather than with them – the result is a consultative, rather than collaborative, approach. Official heritage practices, overseen in Australia by state heritage councils and their agencies, and the use of procedural documents

5 Smith, Uses of Heritage.
like Significance Assessments and Conservation Management Plans continue to privilege elitist conceptions of aesthetic value premised on Western ideals that can devalue dynamic and evolving community uses of heritage.

Byrne has critiqued the implications of the ICHC. For Byrne, while the ICHC aspires to be inclusive, UNESCO’s ‘fantasies of universal value’ and the compunction to ‘go forth to record and conserve’ the intangible means the ICHC does not aid or reflect the type of emotionally laden and socially determined heritage work occurring at the grassroots. However, the ICHC explicitly attempted to avoid replicating the idea of universal value espoused by UNESCO’s World Heritage List. The UNESCO-based regime behind the ICHC aimed to facilitate grassroots heritage and community ownership. However, according to Lixinski, they failed in these aims due to weak mechanisms for community participation. Furthermore, state signatories to the ICHC have replicated their understanding of the World Heritage Convention (1972) and ignored or even appropriated minority cultures (and denuded them of the political meaning) when determining what intangible heritage was worthy of international safeguarding. Byrne concludes: ‘I believe we would be better employed, first, in examining the politics of visibility in the production of heritage and, second, in reconnecting emotionally to the past via the traces we already have recorded.’

Accordingly, this Element privileges a historical approach to place; the aim is to unpack, from the position of one’s subjective experience of the present, migrants’ past experiences, behaviours, and relationships in place – and their interstices with present social concerns. This, as Byrne implies, is contrary to much archaeologically compelled heritage work that is more concerned with ‘inventorying’ potential sites and objects of heritage significance and maintaining the regulated process of so-called expert knowledge. Byrne draws on archaeologist Hamilakis to argue that authorised heritage practice ‘denies the potential to engage as feeling beings with past people’. The preoccupation with compiling mass inventories, tied to Western science and ideas of objectivity, hinders empathy and subjectivity or the ability to connect with the individual humanity of the past’s subjects. I hope this Element offers access to a feeling history, one that does not excise the material past or physical fabric (the remnants of industrial heritage, for example) from their social contexts and the specific circumstances and emotions felt by individual migrant subjects within that space.

10 Ibid., 230.
11 Ibid., 231.
Since the earliest calls in the 1990s to reassess heritage practice in Australia and realign our approach to ‘social value’, a body of literature has emerged. These scholars are interested in how to foster community collaboration with the heritage conservation sector and its appointed experts. This has been the case in the Australian literature with regard to Indigenous heritage work over the past two decades. But when it comes to other Others – the ethnicised and therefore non-Anglophone subjects living and working within the settler-colonial state – the research often adopts as case studies institutionally driven or ‘co-produced’ examples of heritage, rather than examples of practice that emerged from and were controlled by communities themselves. This Element grew out of a concern that too little professional and scholarly attention has been paid to ‘subaltern’ publics, specifically the (new and older waves of) migrants and ethnic minorities who are the subject of (or sometimes ‘add-ons’ in) many state-funded exhibitions and commemorations. We need to consider how ethnicised and migrant subjects actively create and publicise their own heritage and history – especially in changing political and social contexts. In settler-colonial countries like Australia and other Anglophone countries like the United Kingdom, the USA, and Canada, the federal government accepted large numbers of permanent settlers in the decades after WWII, but this was also met by recurrent xenophobic opposition. As indicated, further attention needs to be paid to those communities and individuals actively involved in building and publicising their migration and settlement histories and the intersection of these pasts with wider public histories, like post-war labour, industrial development, and deindustrialisation.

Deindustrialising Region of the Latrobe Valley

Debates surrounding the notion of collective memory are extensive. Astrid Erll, in her 2010 *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, opted for the term ‘cultural’ over collective, partly for the latter’s tendency to invoke impassioned passions.

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debate from all disciplines engaging in memory studies. She concludes: ‘Cultural [collective] memory hinges on the notion of the medial [material], because it is only via medial externalization (from oral speech to writing, painting or using the Internet) that individual memories, cultural knowledge, and versions of history can be shared.’¹⁵ But where does that leave considerations of the social and psychological in the study of collective memory? Most sociological approaches to memory take their cue from Maurice Halbwachs’s seminal works published in the early twentieth century, including On Collective Memory and Social Frameworks of Remembering. Halbwachs positions memory as a social activity achieved via shared consciousness. He argues that the act of remembering cannot be separated from the social group and the social frameworks that determine memory’s articulation. This approach continues to shape the study of memory across disciplines, including history. However, those who adopt a more psychological perspective contest the approach.

Kerwin Lee Klein, taking up criticisms made by psychologists concerned with memory as a cognitive process, stated that ‘careful scholars’ make ‘prefatory disclaimers to ward off charges that they might be indulging in mystical transpositions of individual psychological phenomena onto imaginary collectivities’.¹⁶ This Element has replicated the approach adopted by cultural historians to collective memory: analysing public forms of history – whether monument or museum – as creative material articulations of and responses to collective (or ‘cultural’) memories. Such an approach does not create imaginary collectives; any analysis of collective memory comments on and responds to subjective constructions of imaginary collectives, for all collectives are essentially imagined, memory being but one mode through which this is achieved.

In this vein, sociologist Alon Confiño argues that a more critical approach to memory would consider not only how memory is represented but also how representations are interpreted and received. This reflects larger trends in public history, and more recently in critical heritage studies, that moves us beyond representational analyses or curatorial perspectives.¹⁷ Historian Wulf Kansteiner adopts a similar approach, though he shies away from arguing for Confiño’s all-encompassing histoire des mentalités approach. Rather – and predictably, for a historian – he argues for ‘extensive contextualisation’ in memory studies and a more considered analysis of the wider social, political,

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and cultural environment of a memory’s construction, reception, and contestation. Extensive contextualisation, Kansteiner argues, assists in linking the facts of representation (the tropes on display at the Gippsland Immigration Park, for example) with the facts of reception (their use function, the values they espouse, and their contestation by different publics). This framing is useful for the analysis contained in this Element, but it has its limits too. First, these ‘facts’ of representation and reception are not self-evident but continuously rearranged by different publics. Keightley and Pickering capture this creative tension in their reflections on the ‘active synthesis of remembering and imagination’:

what has been taken over from the past is continually being revised in order to accommodate an open and continually unfolding future ... a commonplace of modernity, with its future-orientated temporality generating a need not only for new experiences but also for the recurrent reassessment of past experiences.18

Second, Kansteiner rejects terminology he sees as better suited to discussions about the psychological and emotional dynamics of individual remembering (rather than collective memory). He is not alone here. Kirk Savage argues that unlike psychologists, cultural historians are interested in ‘memory in external deposits, located not within people, but within shared public space’, which is a fair classification of some work.19 But extensive contextualisation cannot but incorporate a consideration of the emotional, and emotions here are not merely individual cognitive processes and therefore not the reserve of psychological analyses. Emotions are socially mediated, transmitted, and shared; emotions can be politically harnessed and projected for wider social ends.

Studies of emotion in history and heritage have sought to centre the role of certain emotions (love, desire, and attachment; jealousy and anger; pride and dignity) in social movements and as both historically and socially determined phenomena.20 Exploring the role of emotions has aided the study of collective memory and remembering. For example, scholarship addressing the role of trauma and traumatic events in the memory work of refugees and the forcefully displaced adopts an approach to transnational, transversal, or diasporic memory that is invested in unpacking the relationship between ‘memory institutions’,

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‘nationalist imaginaries’, and migrant/emigre/refugee/exile subjectivity, which of course includes emotions.  

Therefore, Erll’s classification of memory studies according to ‘material’, ‘social’, or ‘mental’ approaches is not productive in capturing the trajectory of the field over the past decade, especially in relation to critical heritage studies. This is more than a matter of being interdisciplinary. A consideration of emotions, and new directions in the field of heritage studies that centre community perceptions, also has the result of collapsing the rigid distinction between the individual ‘process of remembering and memory as the product resulting from that activity’. Instead, critical heritage studies compel us to consider the inescapably social nature of memory and its cross-temporal and multi-scalar constitution. In summary, the nexus between representation and reception, between emotions and social context, will be important in interrogating the political and nostalgic work behind migrant heritage-making in the Latrobe Valley.

Subsequent sections offer multi-layered accounts of the community heritages of the deindustrialising region of the Latrobe Valley. These accounts cannot be undertaken without acknowledging the collective and individual expression of certain emotions associated with these working histories and their retelling, including anger, neglect, pride, and dignity. Sociologists have explored the ‘emotional dimensions’ of class identities and the politics of class – and these analytical frameworks have become relevant to the study of industrial heritage and the social, cultural, and political, and economic changes within which former industrial structures have been transformed into heritage sites and museums.

Within these analytical frameworks – those that consider the emotional and subjective dimensions embedded within heritage performances pertaining to a working-class past – the subject of ‘nostalgia’ has become especially relevant.

Emotions and Heritage: Nostalgia

Nostalgia, as an emotive charge in collective memory, is central to the analysis offered in subsequent sections. The Gippsland Immigration Park draws on a nostalgic memory of a migrant and working-class past. Nostalgia remains, in much political discourse on the Left, ‘reviled as a lie, as the essence of reaction’. As an emotion, it is accused of lacking accuracy and ‘taunted as...